

THE
WORKS

OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD

WILLIAM BEVERIDGE, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH.

THE
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OF THE
RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD
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CONTAINING ALL HIS
S E R M O N S,
AS WELL THOSE PUBLISHED BY HIMSELF, AS THOSE SINCE HIS DEATH.

WITH A PREFACE,
Giving some account of the Author and his Writings;
A TABLE OF THE TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE
OCCASIONALLY EXPLAINED;
AND AN
Alphabetical Index
TO THE WHOLE.

A NEW EDITION, IN SIX VOLUMES.

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THE EXEMPLARY HOLINESS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

ACTS ii. 42.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

HAVING this opportunity of preaching the word of God to you, I heartily wish that I could do it so effectually, that, by his blessing upon it, ye may all be the better for it, both in this life and the next: for otherwise my preaching will be in vain, and your hearing also will be in vain; and so it always will be, unless when you hear the word, you receive it, as the Thessalonians did, *not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*, 1 Thess. ii. 13. In them who do not believe it hath no effect at all, but it works effectually upon all that do, by the Holy Spirit of God working together with it, and setting it home upon their hearts and consciences; as we see in this chapter, where we find, that by one short sermon that the apostle St. Peter preached, about three thousand souls were converted to the faith of Christ: for it is here said, *and they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls*, ver. 41

It is true, this was an extraordinary case, the Holy Ghost being that day poured down in a miraculous manner upon the apostles : and they to whom St. Peter then preached were all Jews, but receiving the word with faith, they turned to Christ, and were accordingly baptized, and so made Christians ; and they were the first that were made so, after our Lord's ascension into heaven.

Whereas I am now to preach to such as are Christians already : for I suppose you are all baptized according to Christ's institution, and by that means made his disciples, and members of his body : and therefore I need not persuade you to become Christians, but to believe and live as becometh Christians to do : and for that purpose have chosen these words, from whence to shew how you may and ought to do, after the example of these first converts to the Christian religion, of whom it is here said, that *they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers* ; which is doubtless left upon record by the Holy Ghost, on purpose that we may all know what they did, and, by consequence, what we must do, that we may always live in the true faith of Christ, so as to attain the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls : where we may first observe in general, that they did not think it enough to be baptized into Christ, but they still continued in him, doing all such things as he had appointed, whereby to receive grace and power from him, to walk as becometh his disciples ; and so must you, if you desire to be saved by him. It is your great happiness that ye were by baptism admitted into the church and school of Christ, and so made his disciples and scholars ; but unless you stay there, and learn and practise what ye are there taught, you will be never the better, but rather the worse for it : for now ye are brought into a state of salvation, unless ye continue to do what ye then promised, your condemnation will be the greater, in that ye do not only break the

laws of God, but likewise the promise you made him when ye were baptized. And therefore ye had need to look about you, and take care to live in all respects as Christians ought to do; and for that purpose must follow the great example of these first converts to the faith of Christ, who continued stedfastly in all the great duties of the Christian religion, which are here described and left upon record for your imitation.

First, *they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine.* They did not only hearken to what the apostles said, and believe what they taught, but they continued constant and stedfast in it, so as to believe nothing as necessary to salvation, but what the apostles taught them; but to believe every thing which the apostles taught, being confident that they, being acted and directed by the Spirit of God in what they taught, would never teach them any thing either false or impertinent, nothing but what was infallibly true, and absolutely necessary for them to know and believe, that they might be saved. And therefore they would not hearken to any Jewish fables, or philosophical speculations, nor yet to their own or other men's private opinions, but kept close to the doctrine of the Gospel, as delivered by the apostles of Jesus Christ the founder of it, who gave them authority to preach it, and assisted them with his own Spirit in it, that they might be sure to preach nothing but what he would have them.

This the first Christians knew, and therefore would never give ear to any other teachers but the apostles themselves, and such as were sent and authorized by them to preach the Gospel; and this indeed was one of the doctrines which the apostles taught, that men should not hearken to any other doctrine but what they taught, and keep fast to that. *Hold fast,* saith St. Paul, *the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus,* 2 Tim. i. 13. And St. Peter, writing to all Christians, saith, *This second Epistle, beloved, I write unto you, in both*

which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour, 2 Pet. iii. 1, 2. The prophets and apostles being all acted by the same Spirit, what they commanded men to believe and do, that was necessary to be accordingly believed and done, and nothing else : and therefore he adviseth all to continue stedfastly in their doctrine, without minding what others said or taught.

And this certainly is the first and great thing that Christians in all ages ought to be stedfast in, even in the doctrine which Christ and his apostles taught : for that is the foundation of our whole religion, without which, all our hopes of salvation will fall to the ground ; for it is by this that we believe aright in God, and in Jesus Christ whom he hath sent ; and it is by this also that we rightly understand our duty to God and man ; and therefore without this, we can neither believe nor live according to the Gospel of Christ, and by consequence can never be saved by him.

Wherefore, as ever you hope to be saved, ye must be sure to continue stedfastly in the doctrine which the apostles of Christ, by his order and direction, delivered, at first by word of mouth, and afterwards in writing, that all generations might know it : by which means we are now as fully assured of what the apostles taught, as they could be which heard them preach it ; their doctrine being transmitted to us by the infallible testimony of the Holy Ghost, by which they spoke and wrote it, in that holy book which we call the New Testament : so that whatsoever we there read as taught by the apostles, we are sure was their doctrine, and are therefore bound stedfastly to believe it, and diligently to frame our lives according to it ; but what we do not find there written, we can never be sure that they taught it, and therefore are not obliged to believe or observe it.

From hence ye may all see the excellency of our

church, in that it requires nothing to be believed as an article of faith, but what the apostles first taught, and what the church of Christ in all ages hath believed to be consonant to the doctrine delivered in their writings. But whatsoever opinion hath no ground or foundation in them, that ours, together with the catholic church, rejecteth as either utterly false, or at best not necessary to be believed. And therefore, in order to your continuing stedfastly, as the first Christians did, in the apostles' doctrine, the surest way is to keep close to the doctrine of our church, contained in our Articles and Common Prayer Book, which is plainly the same with that of the apostles in all pointſ, without any addition, diminution, or alteration whatsoever ; which is the great glory of our church, and should make you not only to continue firm and dutiful to it, but likewise to thank God that ye live in such a church wherein ye are duly instructed in all the great truths which Christ and his apostles taught ; and are required to believe nothing else as necessary to your being saved ; by which means, as your minds may be enlightened, and your hearts purified by that faith which was once delivered to the saints, so ye are secure from falling into any damnable heresy, and from being corrupted or perplexed with any of those new and dangerous opinions which the ignorance and superstition of after-ages have brought into the church.

But that you may thus continue in the apostles' doctrine, ye must continue also in fellowship or communion with them, as the first Christians are here said to have done. For the understanding of which, we may observe, that these persons being now baptized according to Christ's institution and order, they were thereby admitted into the number of his disciples, and so were incorporated into him, and made members of that body, of which he is head, which is a distinct society from the rest of mankind, founded by Christ himself under the name of his church, which he promised to be always

with, and to direct, influence, and assist with his own holy Spirit, in the use of those means that he hath instituted and appointed to be there administered for our obtaining that eternal redemption and salvation which he purchased for us with his own most precious blood : and therefore it is here said, that *the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*, ver. 47. For which purpose he ordained and deputed his apostles and their successors, in all ages, to instruct and govern the said society, called his church, and to take care that all who are admitted into it, might have the said means of grace and salvation duly administered to them, that so they might want nothing that is necessary to their being saved by his merits and mediation for them.

Now these persons being of this holy society, *fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*, Eph. ii. 19. they always kept company and held communion or fellowship with them, not only receiving and believing the doctrine which the apostles taught, but likewise observing the rules and orders which they appointed, and using all the means of grace and salvation as administered by them, and such as were deputed by them in the name of Christ to do it : so as not to divide themselves into parties and factions, nor ever separate from that holy society into which they were admitted under any pretence whatsoever, but *continued stedfastly in the fellowship as well as doctrine of the apostles*.

Now if you would be such excellent persons as these first converts to the faith were, you must do as they did, in this as well as in other points. It is your great happiness that ye are of the same apostolical church which they were of, and therefore should *continue stedfastly in fellowship or communion* with it, as they are said to have done. It is true, there were no schisms or divisions in the church then as there are now ; but the reason was, because the people did not make them, as many do in our days, who, notwithstanding that they

are admitted into our church, yet are so far from continuing stedfast in communion with it, that they never think that they can separate themselves far enough from it. But let such do what they please, and take what follows ; I must advise you in his name, who laid down his own life to save you, and hath brought you into his church on purpose that ye might be saved by him, in his name I advise and exhort you all to hold constant communion with it, as in believing the doctrine, so likewise in loving the members, observing the orders, submitting to the discipline, and exercising yourselves continually in the means of grace which are there administered to you : so long as ye do so, ye are in the ready way to heaven, and if ye hold out to the last, ye will certainly come thither, by him in whose name I advise you to it : for while ye live in communion with our church, ye are sure to have all the means which Christ hath appointed for your salvation faithfully administered to you, in the same way and manner that he appointed : ye are sure to be instructed in all the articles of the Christian faith, and in your whole duty both to God and man. Ye are sure to pray together in such a form, as both in the matter, method, and manner of it agrees exactly with the word of God : ye are sure to have the sacraments, instituted by Christ, administered to you in all respects according to his institution, without any additions to it, or detractions from it : ye are sure to have all this done by persons rightly ordained and authorized thereunto in the same way and manner which his apostles, by the direction of his holy Spirit, hath settled in his church : and ye are sure that what they teach you is sound and orthodox, the same doctrine which Christ and his apostles taught.

For when they are ordained, they solemnly profess and promise in the presence of God, that they will instruct the people committed to their charge out of the holy Scriptures, and that they will teach nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but what they are per-

suaded may be concluded and proved by the said Scriptures. Neither can they afterwards be admitted to preach, till they have subscribed to the Articles and Liturgy of our church, in which, as was before observed, the doctrine of the apostles is fully contained. And besides all this, so long as ye continue in the communion of our church, ye are sure to have the word and sacraments administered to you by such as have the care of your souls committed to them, and who are then obliged, both in duty and interest, to take as much care of you as of themselves, their own eternal salvation depending in a great measure upon the faithful discharge of their office and ministry towards you, to which also God hath promised the assistance of his own grace and holy Spirit, to make it effectual to the great ends and purposes for which it is ordained; so that, all things considered, it is morally impossible that you should be led into error, be ignorant of the truth, or miss of grace and salvation, if you hold constant communion with the church, and sincerely believe and live as ye are here taught.

But if you once leave the church, whither ye will go next, I know not, nor ye neither: but this I know, that go where ye will, as ye will certainly want some of the means of grace which ye here enjoy, so you will be uncertain whether ye shall enjoy any of them, so as to attain the end, even the salvation of your souls: so that the most favourable and most charitable construction that can be put upon the separation from our church is, that it is leaving a certainty for an uncertainty, which no wise man would do in any thing, much less in a matter upon which his eternal welfare depends: from whence ye may see, if ye will, that it is your wisdom and your interest, as well as duty, to be steadfast, not only in the doctrine, but likewise in fellowship or communion with the church, as the first disciples were.

The next thing they continued steadfastly in was *breaking of bread*, or the celebration of the Lord's supper,

which is so necessary to our holding communion with the church, that it hath got the name almost wholly appropriated to itself, being commonly called the communion, because in it we communicate both with Christ the head, and in him with all the sound members of his mystical body, the church. In this therefore they continued stedfastly; that is, they never failed to receive the Lord's supper whensoever it was administered, which was usually every day, or at least every Lord's day: for it is written, *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread,* Acts xx. 7. they did not come together, it seems, to hear a sermon, which many, too many in our days, place the most part, if not the whole of their religion in; but they came to communicate together in Christ's mystical body and blood; only being met together, the apostle took that occasion to give them a sermon. But the chief end of their coming together was to receive the sacrament, which therefore every one did, none offering to go away without receiving it: and if any did without shewing just cause, they were looked upon no longer as Christians, and therefore were cast out of the church, as not worthy to be of that holy society, in that they did not keep communion with it in the highest act of the Christian religion, and that which distinguisheth it from all other.

If you would be such holy persons as these were, so as to live with them in heaven; in this point also ye must follow their holy example. Ye live in a church so truly apostolical, that she hath taken care that this holy sacrament may be administered, as it was in the apostles' days, at least every Lord's day, and also every holy-day in the year. And where there are a sufficient number of communicants in any parish, the minister cannot refuse to give it them whensoever they desire it: and I hope there is never a minister in the diocese, but would be more ready to administer than his people can be to receive it. In the place where I had the honour

to serve God at his altar, before he called me hither, I administered it every Lord's day for above twenty years together, and was so far from ever wanting communicants, that I had always as many as I and two curates could well administer it to them : for people found such extraordinary benefit and ghostly comfort from it, that they never thought they could receive it often enough ; and the oftener they received it, the more they still desired it, many never omitting it, if they could possibly come to it ; whereby they became the great ornaments of our holy religion, such as these first converts were : and such ye may all be, if you would but take the same course for it, the sacrament of our Lord's supper being the great means whereby to derive grace and power from him, *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world* ; as you would find by experience if ye were but once accustomed to it, which I therefore heartily wish ye were ; at least you must neglect no opportunities that ye can get of receiving it with that repentance, faith, and charity, which is requisite to the due performance of so great and heavenly a duty as that is.

But for that purpose ye must continue stedfastly, as in breaking of bread, so likewise, as these first disciples of our Lord did, in prayers, that is, in the public prayers of the church : for what they did in private, every one by himself, could not be so well known ; neither was it so material to know that, as how they carried themselves in relation to the church, that fellowship or communion of saints into which they were now admitted, with whom they constantly joined in their public devotions, or such prayers as were common to them all, and so both testified their communion with them, and assisted in the worship of the most high God, and imploring his mercy for all in general, as well as every one for himself in particular ; and that too, not only now and then, but every day, or as oft as possibly they could.

And in this also ye ought to follow their pious ex-

ample, by being stedfast and constant, not only in your private, but public devotions, according to that apostolical form which our church hath prescribed, that all the members of it, wheresoever they are, might join together with one heart and mind, in hearing God's holy word, in praying to him, and praising his most holy name, not only once or twice a week, but twice every day in the year, as the church requires. And accordingly there are many places in the kingdom where the prayers are now read twice every day, and I heartily wish it could be so in this too: then you would see another face of religion among you, than you do now; for they who constantly and devoutly attended the prayers, would find themselves grow wiser and better every day more than other; and they who cannot, or will not come, would at least be put in mind of their duty, by hearing the bell every day calling them to it. In short, I know nothing that can contribute more effectually to keep up a due sense of God, and the true Christian religion in any place, than frequent communions and daily prayers. This was the way wherein the saints of God walked in the apostles' days: *they continued stedfastly, as in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, so likewise in breaking bread, and in prayers.* And if you would follow them while ye are upon earth, ye need not doubt but ye will come to them in heaven, through the intercession which our blessed Saviour is always making for them who do so.

In his name therefore I beseech you all to do so: *continue stedfastly, as they did, in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship: be not tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive,* Eph. iv. 14. This was a necessary caution in the apostles' days, and so it is in ours, wherein that prophecy of St. Peter is fulfilled, where he saith, *There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily*

shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction, 2 Pet. ii. 1. And that of St. Paul, This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, &c. Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, and led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 And elsewhere he foretels, the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, chap. iv. 3. This you see was foretold by the Spirit of God in the apostles, and therefore cannot wonder it should be so. It cannot be otherwise but as St. Paul saith, there must be also heresies or schisms among you, that they which are approved of may be made manifest among you, 1 Cor. xi. 13. But do ye take care to be in the number of those that are approved of for their stedfastness to the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, always carrying in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves, Matt. vii. 15.

But it is not enough to continue stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, but ye must do so likewise in breaking of bread and in prayers, and in all the means which Christ hath ordained whereby to obtain grace and salvation by him; which ye cannot choose but do, if ye really mind your future state, and make it your chief care and study in this world to prepare for the next, that ye may be meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. And why should not ye be so as well as others? Ye have the same Scriptures to direct you, the same Spirit to assist you, the same sacraments to strengthen you, the same

Saviour to intercede for you, as they had ; why then should not ye get to heaven as well as they ? Whatsoever your condition is in this world, ye are all as yet capable of eternal life and happiness ; and living in such a church where the means of grace are so duly administered to you, ye cannot miss of it, if ye do but seek it as ye ought, before all things else.

This therefore is that which I would now persuade you all to, and should think myself happy if I could do it. Play no longer with religion, as people commonly do, but set upon the practice of it in good earnest. As ye profess to believe the Gospel, live according to the rules and precepts of it, that ye may adorn your holy profession with a suitable conversation. Let not drunkenness or uncleanness, swearing, cursing, lying, covetousness, contempt of God's holy word, or any such notorious sins, be so much as named among you ; but strive all ye can to shine as lights in the world, that ye may be the great examples of true piety and virtue to one another, and to all that are about you. This would be the most effectual means to convince the enemies of our church and holy religion of their errors and mistakes, when they see you who profess it so far exceeding and out-doing them in your constancy at your devotions, in your frequency at the holy communion, in your temperance and sobriety, in your meekness, patience, and humility, in your truth and justice in all your dealings together, in your liberality to your poor brethren, in your zeal for God, in your loyalty to your sovereign, in your kindness, love, and charity to one another, and in all such good works as God hath prepared for you in your several places and callings to walk in ; still trusting in your blessed Saviour, both for his assistance of you in what ye do, and for God's acceptance of it when it is done.

This is the way too to have a place ready prepared for you in heaven against your departure out of this wicked and naughty world, that you may live together with the glorified saints and angels, and with Christ

himself, in all the ease and plenty, in all the joy, happiness, and glory that creatures are capable of, not only for some time, but to all eternity, and all through his merits and mediation for you.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord; in the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, to whom, with the Father and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever.

S E R M O N CIII.

CHRIST'S GRACE SUFFICIENT TO MAKE CHRISTIANS
HOLY.

PHIL. iv. 13.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

ALTHOUGH we had no divine revelation for it, yet our own experience might easily convince us, that we are not such creatures as the all-wise and most holy God at first made and designed us to be, but that we are very much corrupted, degenerated, and fallen from our first estate: for God made all things good, and therefore man too; but now there is not a man upon the face of the earth that is or doth good of himself, no not one. The very best may say, as one of the best that ever was did, *I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me: for I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members*, Rom. vii. 21, 22, 23. They that have no sense at all of good or evil upon their minds, are too sad instances of the corruption of human nature. If any can plead exemption from it, it must be such as St. Paul was, who are not only sensible of the difference between good and evil, but really desire to eschew the evil, and do good. And yet these find, as he did, a contrary principle in them, putting them upon doing the evil they would not, and hindering them in

doing the good they would do ; whereby it comes to pass, that of themselves they can do nothing that can truly be termed good, because that nothing is perfectly so ; but in their very best actions there is still such a mixture of evil, so many failures and imperfections, as quite spoil and corrupt them. They cannot pray without distraction, nor so much as think upon God, but the thoughts of other things will be crowding into their heads : they cannot come into God's presence, but their minds will be running out again every moment : they cannot read, or hear God's holy word, nor praise his name, nor receive the blessed sacrament itself, but they are still disturbed and interrupted in it by some unruly passion or other : they cannot subdue any sin so, but it will go near to get up again ; nor overcome the world so, as to keep it always under : they cannot give an alms, but they are apt to fail either in the quantity of what they give, or else in the quality and manner of giving it. In short, they can do nothing as they ought to do it ; but when they have exerted the utmost of their own strength, and have done all that possibly they can by it, they come short of what the law of God requires. This they all know and feel by woful experience, and it is the greatest trouble that they have in the world ; so great that it makes them cry out, as St Paul did, in the place before quoted, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?* Rom. vii. 24.

Who shall deliver me ? It is a very hard question ; but the apostle resolves it in the next words, saying, *I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord*, ver. 25. As if he had said, though none else can deliver me from the body of this death and sin, yet I thank God for it, he can and will do it, through Jesus Christ our Lord ; where we may observe how he ascribes his deliverance from the power of sin, and his ability to do good, wholly and solely to the grace of God, through Jesus Christ : by whom the same apostle, who there complains so

grievously of his own natural weakness and inability to do any thing that is good, in my text assures us, he could do all things; *I can do all things*, saith he, *through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

A strange expression, but not so strange as true; nor true but it is as great a comfort and encouragement to all that concern themselves in good earnest about their future state: for we cannot but all know, that in order to our being happy in the other world, it is necessary for us to do many things whilst we are in this, whereby to prepare and qualify ourselves for it; and we cannot but be sensible withal, that by our own strength we are not able to do any one of these things as we ought to do it; and by consequence, if we look no farther than ourselves, we may even lay aside all thoughts of heaven, and trouble ourselves no more about it, for all our labour would be in vain and to no purpose: but when we consider on the other side, that although we can do nothing of ourselves, yet we can do all things through Christ that strengthens us; this must needs inspire us with holy resolutions, *to be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, as knowing that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord*; as we see it did St. Paul, who, notwithstanding his manifold sins and infirmities, which made him look upon himself as the chiefest of all sinners, yet here he rejoices and glories in his power to do all things by Christ's assistance, *I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.*

And though he speaks this only of himself, yet he speaks it of himself only as a Christian; and therefore all Christians may speak it, every one of himself, as well as he did; and it is left upon record on purpose that we might all know where our strength lies, and how we also may be enabled to do all things, even by Christ which strengthens us.

But that we may fully understand the true sense and meaning of the words, we shall briefly consider in what

sense it is here said, that we can do all things ; how Christ strengthens us ; and by what means we may receive strength from him to do all things.

The power of doing all things is the same with omnipotence, which is one of God's incommunicable perfections : how then comes it here to be communicated to his creatures ? Much in the same sense as it is in God ; only in a lower degree, as creatures are capable of it : and though it be attributed unto them, it is still God's power in them, and so it is he, not they, that are omnipotent ; and although he be omnipotent, there are some things of which it may be truly said that he cannot do them : he cannot do that which implies a contradiction : he cannot deny himself, he cannot lie, he cannot die. And yet he is not less omnipotent because he cannot do these things, but rather, he therefore cannot do them because he is omnipotent, such things as those arguing only weakness and impotence. But he is therefore properly said to be omnipotent, because he can do whatsoever he will : so that there are many things a Christian cannot do : he cannot create a new world ; he cannot produce any thing out of nothing ; for then he would be both a creature and a creator, which implies a contradiction : but a Christian can do whatsoever he will as a Christian ; all things that God would have him do in order to his eternal salvation : and in this sense it is that St. Paul here saith, *he can do all things*, as is plain from the context ; *I know*, saith he, *both how to be abased, and I know how to abound ; every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need* ; and then adds, *I can do all things*, that is, all such things as belong to me as a Christian to do, in whatsoever state or condition I am : I can do all things that God requires me to do, whereby to promote his honour and glory in the world, and at last to obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ my Lord.

And in this sense all Christians, and we as well as

others, can do all things, all things that God would have us ; all things that we are bound to do to him or one another ; all things necessary to fit us for heaven, or to bring us thither. Particularly we can repent of all our sins, and turn to God ; we can crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts : we can resist the devil, and make him flee from us : we can overcome the world, and live above it : we can love, and fear, and desire, and rejoice, and trust in God with all our hearts : we can pray sincerely to him, we can praise him heartily, we can read and hear his word attentively, and receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper worthily : we can devote our time to his honour, spend our estates in his service, and, if there be occasion, lay down our lives for his sake : we can adore and worship him with reverence and godly fear ; we can walk in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And as for our neighbours, we can honour and obey our parents, and submit to the governors that God hath set over us in church or state : we can *love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us* : we can as freely forgive the injuries we have received from others, as we desire God should forgive those we have done him : we can make restitution of what we have heretofore wronged others of, and for the future keep ourselves from wronging any man in name, body, or estate : we can be meek and humble, chaste and modest, sober and temperate in ourselves : and we can be true and faithful, just and righteous in our dealings with all men : we can always do to others, as we would have them do to us : we can keep our tongues from lying and slandering, as well as our hands from picking and stealing : we can instruct the ignorant, reprove the obstinate, support the weak, comfort the disconsolate, help the oppressed, and relieve the poor, according as opportunity shall serve, and our estates will bear. In short, we can do all that the grace of God,

which brings salvation, teacheth us : we can *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world* : and when we go out of it, we can commit our souls to him that redeemed them with his own most precious blood.

But how can these things be ? How is it possible for us to do so many and great things as these are, when, as the apostle saith, *we are not sufficient of ourselves so much as to think any thing as of ourselves* ? 2 Cor. iii. 5. It is true he saith so, but he resolves the doubt in the very next words, saying, that *our sufficiency is of God*. And so he doth in my text, saying, *I can do all things* ; how ? of myself ? by mine own strength ? no, but *through Christ which strengtheneth me*. And if he who is almighty, and can of himself do all things, if he strengtheneth us, it is no wonder that we by his strength can do all things too.

But then the next question to be considered is, how Christ strengtheneth us : how ; not whether he doth it : for that he doth it, there can be no question, it being so expressly asserted here by the apostle ; and besides, unless Christ strengthens us, so as that we can do all things by him that are necessary to salvation, he would not be our Saviour. But that he is our Saviour, and *is able to save to the utmost all that come to God by him*, we all agree ; and therefore cannot but with all acknowledge that there is nothing necessary to be done in order to our being saved by him, but what we may be enabled by him to do.

But how he strengthens such infirm creatures as we are, so as that we can do all things by him, is a great question, and very difficult to be resolved, forasmuch as he doth it by his almighty power, which we cannot comprehend while we are in the body, nor perceive how he exerts it upon us : only this we know, that he doth it insensibly, and by degrees, as we are able to bear it ; and that he doth it, not as God only, but as God-man, and so the Mediator betwixt God and us ;

and as such, hath all power given unto him both in heaven and earth, by which he is able to empower us to do all things that are required to our obtaining that eternal redemption which he hath purchased for us with the price of his own blood. And as Almighty God, the Creator of the world, doth by his general providence govern and dispose all things in it, so as that every thing doth what he would have it, and so answer his end in creating it ; so Christ, having purchased to himself an universal church, takes particular care of that, ordering all things in it, and affording every member of it power sufficient to do whatsoever he would have done by it, for the accomplishing his end in purchasing it : and that we may not be altogether ignorant of his way in giving such power and strength to the several members of his church, to do all things that he requires of them, he himself hath given us some light into it, both with his own mouth, and by his holy Spirit inspiring his prophets and apostles to do it.

As where he saith, *I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine ; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches : he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without me ye can do nothing*, John xv. 1, 4, 5.

Whereby he gives us to understand, that as a vine branch, if it be cut off or severed from the stock, presently withers and grows fruitless ; but if it continue in the stock, it receives sap and nourishment from thence, whereby it is enabled to bring forth such fruit as God designed it should ; so if a man be not in Christ, but is separated from him, such a one can do nothing at all that is good ; but if a man be grafted in him, or united to him, so as to be a true member of him, then as the stock communicates its virtues to the branches, so doth he communicate or convey from himself so much grace

and virtue to such a one, as is sufficient to make him fruitful in all good works.

St. Paul explains it much the same way : he compares Christ and his church to the body of a man or other animal ; of this body Christ is the head, and all true Christians are the members, every one in his proper place, 1 Cor. xii. 12. Eph. iv. 15, 16. Now as the several parts of a man's body are all animated, and enabled to perform their respective offices by the animal spirits which are transmitted into them from the head ; so all the sound members of Christ's body are actuated by the Spirit that proceedeth from him, and is directed and infused by him into every one of them, whereby they are strengthened and empowered to perform all such duties as he hath set them.

Again, the Holy Ghost compares Christ to the sun, saying by the prophet Malachi, *Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings*, Mal. iv. 2. which expression, being doubtless to be understood of Christ, will give us great light into this mystery : for the sun, we know, doth not only give light unto the world, but also heat, motion, and activity to all things in it : it is that which invigorates the earth, and makes it fruitful, causing all sorts of herbs, and plants, and trees, to spring out of it, and to bring forth flowers, and fruits, and seeds, every one according to its respective kind and quality. Now what the sun is to the world, that is Christ to his church : he is the Sun of righteousness, that causeth righteousness to spring up there ; and being long since risen, he shines continually upon it, with healing in his wings or rays, even the wholesome benign influences of his holy Spirit, whereby he heals us of our unfruitfulness, and all our spiritual distempers ; so that we shall not be *barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ*, as St. Peter speaks, but shall abound in *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, tempe-*

rance, and the like, which St. Paul therefore calls the fruits of the Spirit, Gal. v. 22.

And as the sun, although the body of it be only in heaven, yet by its beams produceth such wonderful effects as we see it doth upon earth ; so Christ, although his body or human nature, far more glorious than the sun, be not only in the highest heavens at the right hand of God, yet by his Spirit that proceedeth from him, he so actuates and influenceth his church upon earth, that the sound members of it are enabled thereby to do all those wonderful things we spake of, even all things that are required of them.

But in this Christ infinitely exceeds the sun, forasmuch as though his body of human nature be only in heaven, yet his divine person, to which that nature is united, is in all places of the world, and in a more peculiar manner in his church, with all his true and faithful disciples. This he assured his apostles of, just as he was going up to heaven, *Lo*, saith he, *I am with you always*, *πάντας τὰς ἡμέρας*, every day, continually, *to the end of the world*, Matt. xxviii. 20. And elsewhere he tells them, that his Holy Spirit, *the Comforter*, *should abide with them for ever*, John xiv. 16. He shall not only come to them now and then, but shall abide constantly with them, he shall dwell with them, and in them.

To which purpose we have a remarkable passage in St. Paul, who, being troubled with a thorn in the flesh, earnestly besought the Lord Christ that it might depart from him ; and at length received this gracious answer, *My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*. From whence the apostle draws this inference, *Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*, 2 Cor. xii. 9. where the word is ἐπισκευή, *may dwell in me*, as the שכינה or *divine presence* did in the tabernacle and temple, where there was a kind of a cloud, the symbol of God's special presence,

resting continually between the cherubim over the ark, which was therefore called *שכינה* *God's inhabitation* or *dwelling there*: and so it is that he dwells in every Christian, whose body is said to be the temple of God: *Know ye not*, saith the apostle, *that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you*, 1 Cor. iii. 16. And again, *What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?* 1 Cor. vi. 19. From whence it appears, that every true Christian hath the Spirit of God residing and dwelling continually in him, as well as the temple of God ever had it; and it is for this cause that he is called the temple of God, it being by this means that he is dedicated to God, and God keeps, as it were, possession of him, by dwelling continually in him.

But where the Spirit of God and Christ is, there is Christ; where that abideth, there Christ abideth. *Hereby we know*, saith St. John, *that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us*, 1 John iii. 24. And hence it is, that Christ himself is so often said to be in us. *I in them*, saith he, *and thou in me*, John xvii. 23. And *that the love wherewith thou lovest me, may be in them, and I in them*, ver. 26. *He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him*, John vi. 56. And St. Paul saith, *I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*, Gal. ii. 20. And in the same Epistle to the Galatians, *My little children*, saith he, *of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you*, Gal. iv. 19. And to the Ephesians, *that Christ may dwell in your hearts*, Eph. iii. 16. And elsewhere, *Know ye not your own selves, that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates*, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. And this he saith is *the great mystery which was hid from former ages, but it is now made manifest to the saints*. To whom, saith he, *God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is, Christ in you, the hope of glory*, Col. i. 27.

All which expressions, used by Christ himself and his holy Spirit, plainly imply, that he himself by his said Spirit doth in a special and marvellous manner inhabit and reside in all true Christians, exercising his own almighty power in them, and so sanctifying them wholly in soul, body, and spirit, and enabling them to order their whole conversation according to the rules he hath set them in his holy Gospel; as is intimated also by the word which we translate *strengtheneth* in my text: for in the original it is, ἐνδυναμοῦντι, *that strengtheneth me within*; implying, that he himself is within us, strengthening and assisting us; and, as the same apostle saith in another place of this Epistle, *working in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*, Phil. ii. 13. And when Christ himself doth in such a wonderful manner inhabit and strengthen us by his own almighty Spirit, it is no wonder that we can do all things; we may well do all things by him, who can do all things by himself.

But there is another question to be resolved, which nearly concerns us all, and that is, what we must do, that we also, as well as others, may be thus strengthened by Christ, so as to be able to do all things by him. But this will be easily resolved: for it is plain from the whole design and tenour of the Gospel, that the great thing required on our parts is to believe in him; not only to believe what is written of him, and revealed by him in his holy Gospel, but also to trust and depend upon him to strengthen and assist us, according to the promises which are there made us: for he himself resolves the whole of our salvation by him into our believing in him; saying, that *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*, John iii. 16. And if whosoever believeth in him shall have everlasting life, then whosoever believeth in him, must needs be strengthened and enabled by him to do whatsoever is necessary in order thereunto: and so be sure every one is, who believeth in him, upon that

account because he believeth in him, faith being the means whereby we are united to Christ, and made members of his body, and therefore participate of that holy Spirit which proceedeth from him, our head: for *we are made partakers of Christ*, saith the apostle, *if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast to the end*, Heb. iii. 14. that is, so long as we continue to believe stedfastly and confidently in him, we are partakers of Christ, not only of his merit for the pardon of our sins, but of his strength and Spirit, to direct and assist us in doing all such good works as he hath prepared for us to walk in: for as we are justified, so we are sanctified also by faith in him; we may be confident of it, for we have it from his own mouth, saying, *that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me*, Acts xxvi. 18.

And hence it is, that all the great exploits that a Christian doth, are still ascribed to his faith. By faith we overcome the world: *for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* 1 John v. 4, 5. By faith we resist and conquer all the powers of hell: *above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked*, Eph. vi. 16. By this we obtain whatsoever we ask of God: *Therefore I say unto you*, saith Christ himself, *what things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them*, Mark xi. 24. By faith we can remove mountains, Matt. xvii. 20. that is, we can do the greatest and most difficult things that God requires: as we see in the father of the faithful, who at God's command was able to offer up his only son, in whom God himself had promised that he and all nations should be blessed; which was certainly the hardest task that ever was set any man; but it was not too hard for faith, to which nothing is impossible, as Christ himself

said to the man in the Gospel, *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*, Mark ix. 23. And the reason is, because *faith*, as the apostle saith, *is the substance of things hoped for*, causing all those great things which God hath promised, and we therefore hope for at his hands, actually to subsist, and be verified in us. But God hath promised, that he himself, to whom all things are possible, will strengthen and enable us to do his will: and therefore it is impossible that any thing which he commands should be impossible to one that believeth. Hence therefore, if we desire to be so assisted by Christ, as to be able to do all things through him, we must firmly believe in him, and live with a constant trust and dependence upon him for his assistance, and then we cannot fail of it; but as Abraham believed, and it was imputed to him for righteousness; so we thus believing in Christ, shall by him be enabled to fulfil all righteousness, so as that notwithstanding any defects there may be in it by reason of our imperfect state here below, yet it shall be *acceptable to God through Jesus Christ our Lord*, 1 Pet. ii. 5. And so we may truly say with St. Paul, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*.

The sense of the words being thus cleared up, it will be easy to observe several things in them very worthy of a Christian's notice. First, we may observe that we can do nothing of ourselves; for if we do all things by Christ, there is nothing left for us to do of ourselves without him; and it is very well there is not; for if there was, I do not know how we should do it, seeing Christ himself saith, *without me ye can do nothing*, John xv. 5. As he is God, we can do nothing at all, as he is Christ our Saviour, we can do nothing that is good, without him. It is true, we can sin without him, we can dishonour God without him, we can destroy ourselves without him; but the doing of such things is not so properly doing any thing, as not doing what we ought: but we cannot save ourselves, we cannot honour

God, we cannot keep any one of his commands, without him: *for we are not sufficient of ourselves so much as to think any thing of ourselves*, 2 Cor. iii. 5. And if we cannot think any thing good of ourselves, we can much less do it: no, when we do ill we must blame ourselves, when we do well we must thank God for it: and therefore whatsoever it is wherein we may seem to excel others, we have no cause to be proud of it, or to glory in it; much less can we merit any thing by it, seeing we are beholden wholly unto our Saviour for it: for as the apostle argues, *Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou which thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

This is a thing much to be observed: for if we happen to be or do any thing better than others, we are very apt to boast, or at least to be proud of it, which doth not only spoil all the good we do, but makes us incapable of doing any good at all; *for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble*, 1 Pet. v. 5. So that where there is pride, there is no grace; and where there is no grace, no good be sure can be done there: and therefore, as ever we desire to do all things, or indeed any thing at all by Christ's assistance, we must be always humble and lowly in our own eyes, and truly sensible of our own weakness and inability to do any thing without him, and then we shall be in a right disposition to receive such power and virtue from him, as to be able to say, we can do all things through Christ which strengthens us.

But in the next place, we may observe also from hence, that notwithstanding our own natural weakness and infirmities, we have no cause to complain of our inability to keep any of God's commandments; for what is wanting in us, is abundantly supplied by our blessed Saviour. Though we can do nothing without him, there is nothing but we may do by him, who hath not

only repaired the loss we sustained in our first parents, but hath done it with mighty advantage to us : by them we lost our natural, by him we gain supernatural ; by them we lost finite, by him we gain infinite strength ; by them we lost our own, by him we have the power of God himself to enable us to do his will ; that power by which God himself doth whatsoever he will : so that we have not so much cause to be sorry for our fall in the first Adam, as we have to rejoice at our redemption by the second, who, as he hath broken the head of the old serpent, and tied his hands himself, so he gives us power to do it too, the same power by which he himself did it ; that power which no creature is able to resist, and, by consequence, not all the devils in hell. It is true, St. Paul represents them to us under very frightful appearances, as if he had a mind to terrify us with them, calling them *principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places*, Eph. vi. 12. and yet we are able to conquer them all : conquer them did I say, that is too low an expression ; for, as the same apostle speaks, *ὑπερνικῶμεν, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us*, Rom. viii. 37. We do not only conquer them, but we do it with joy and triumph, being fully persuaded, as he there goes on triumphantly, *that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*, Rom. viii. 38, 39.

And as by this divine power which we receive from Christ, we are able to destroy the works of the devil ; so likewise the works of God, even all such works as he sees good to set us. *I can do all things*, saith St. Paul ; neither did he only say it, but do it : what did he not do, what did he not suffer for Christ's sake ? It would make one amazed to read or hear the history of his life, as he himself describes it, 2 Cor. xi. 22, 23, &c.

and yet he was so far from sinking under any burden that was laid upon him, that he took pleasure and delight in it. *I take pleasure*, saith he, *in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake*, 2 Cor. xii. 10. Strange things for a man to take pleasure in, but not for a Christian assisted by Christ himself, as he intimates in the following words; saying, *for when I am weak, then am I strong*; that is, the weaker I am in myself, the more strength I receive from Christ. And what could not he do by his strength who can do all things? By that he thought himself able to endure the very flames of hell: for he could wish himself *accursed from Christ*, for the glory of God, in the salvation of his brethren the Jews, Rom. ix. 3. which is certainly the hardest thing that it is possible for a creature to do, and more than God ever required of any man: and yet St. Paul, as well as Moses, could willingly have undergone it, if it had been possible, for Christ's sake and by his strength. And although the strength of Christ does not manifest itself after the same manner, yet it is the same in all true Christians, as it was in St. Paul: and therefore we need not despond or despair of doing any thing that God commands, seeing he commands nothing but what he himself gives us power to do. And we can do nothing by our own, by his power there is nothing but we can do; so that every one of us may say as truly as St. Paul, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*. But, as the same apostle elsewhere observes, *we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of men*, 2 Cor. iv. 7. The power which we have in and by Christ is excellent, it is infinite, such power whereby we may or can do all things: but we who have this power, being of ourselves but finite, weak, and infirm creatures, we seldom or never use it so as actually to do all things by it, or indeed any thing so perfectly and exactly as the law requires. It is true, as Christ him-

self knows, and therefore hath made abundant provision for it: for he having in our nature, and for our sakes, been perfectly obedient, even to death itself; hence as we have infinite power in him to enable us to do all things, so we have infinite merit too, to satisfy for the defects of our obedience, and to render every thing we do as well-pleasing to God, as if it was most perfectly done; or, as the apostle himself expresseth it, he makes us *perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ*, Heb. xiii. 21. So that as we can do all things through Christ which strengthens us, so God accepts of all things we do, through his merits and mediation for us.

Furthermore, we may observe from these words, that whatsoever we do by Christ, it is still we that do it. *I*, saith the apostle, *can do all things through Christ*, and, *through Christ which strengtheneth me*. He was the person whom Christ enabled to act, and he was the person who acted by that ability which Christ gave him. So it is with all of us; all the good we do, we do it by Christ's assistance; but we are properly the agents who do it by that assistance. As when he himself was incarnate of the blessed Virgin, he was conceived in her by the power of the Holy Ghost overshadowing her, and yet she is said to have conceived him. *Behold*, saith the angel unto her, *thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name Jesus*, Luke i. 31. So here, all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works come from God, being wrought in us by the power of Christ's holy Spirit; yet nevertheless we are the persons who produce and act them by that power: and therefore, where our Saviour saith to his disciples, *When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you*, Matt. x. 19, 20. the meaning is not,

that they should not be the persons that spake; for he himself saith they shall, saying, *it shall be given you what ye shall speak*; but the meaning is, that they should not speak of themselves, of their own heads; but the matter they were to speak, should be dictated and suggested into them by the Holy Ghost, who is therefore said to speak in them; but they were to speak it to the people. To the same purpose is that remarkable saying of St. Paul, *By the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*, 1 Cor. xv. 10. that is, not I by my own strength, but by the grace of God: it is by that I laboured more abundantly than others; it is by that I am what I am, and do what I do; but still it is I that am and do so. He ascribes the glory of all he did to the grace of God, yet nevertheless he was the person who did it by that grace: as, although it be the heat and influence of the sun, which, by God's blessing upon it, causeth the earth to fructify; yet it is *the earth itself that bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed*, as the apostle speaks, Heb. vi. 7.

Neither will it seem strange, that we should be said to do that which we do not by our own, but by Christ's strength, if we consider that in this case we are not mere tools or machines; but Christ by his holy Spirit moves upon our minds in a way suitable to our nature, as we are reasonable creatures, endowed with the power of discerning between good and evil, and of choosing the one before the other; and therefore he useth no violence upon us; he doth not drive, but lead us, Rom. ii. 4. he doth not force us one way or other contrary to our wills; but he dispels those clouds and fogs which darken our understandings, and corrupt our judgments, and so he clears up our apprehensions of good and evil, that we may judge aright both of one and the other; and then freeing our wills from such distempers as dis-

order and pervert them, he influenceth and disposeth them so, that we freely, and of our own accord, choose the good before the evil, and so become *a willing people in the day of his power*, Psal. cx. 3. willing to observe and do whatsoever he commands. But for this we are beholden to his power, who is therefore said *to work in us to will, as well as to do*, Phil. ii. 13. because it is by his grace that our wills are thus inclined to do what is good, as well as our hands empowered to do it: and therefore David prays, that God would incline his heart, saying to him, *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies*, Psal. cxix. 36. And accordingly, after the repetition of each commandment, we pray to God, saying, *Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law*. And seeing Christ is pleased thus to work upon us in a way so agreeable to our own natural constitution; although we can do nothing but by his grace and power, yet whatsoever we do, we are the persons who do it, and who do it as men, as understanding and free agents, with the whole bent and inclination of our own wills, and so make it our own act; as it is said of Lydia, *that God opened her heart, that she attended to what was spoken by Paul*, Acts xvi. 14. God opened her heart, and then she herself attended and embraced the truth. So in my text, although St. Paul was sensible that whatsoever he did, he did it only by the strength of Christ, yet he doth not say, Christ doth all things by me, but, *I myself can do all things by Christ which strengtheneth me*.

And hence it is that God is graciously pleased for his Son's sake to accept of what we do, as done by us, because though we do it not by our own strength, but his, yet it is we that do it; and although we are so far from meriting any thing at his hands by what we do, that we are more beholden to him than he is to us for it: yet howsoever upon the account of what Christ hath merited for us, he of his infinite mercy is pleased to recompense all the good we do with a far more ex-

ceeding and eternal weight of glory. This we may be assured of, as St. Paul was, when he said, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*: all this he did through Christ which strengthened him: and then he adds, *from henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to them also that love his appearing*, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. And so on the other side, if any of us fail in our duty to God, we must bear the blame and the punishment too: for seeing Christ's grace is sufficient for us all, and none of us but may, if we will, do all things necessary to our salvation through him; if there be any such thing which we do not, it is not because we cannot, but because we will not do it, and so the fault is wholly in ourselves, in the obstinacy and perverseness of our own wills, and therefore we justly deserve to be punished for it. This the Gospel represents to us under the similitude of a tree, that hath all things necessary to make it fruitful, and yet continues barren, or doth not bring forth good fruit. Now also, saith St. John the Baptist, even now, that the Sun of righteousness is risen upon the world; *now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire*, Matt. iii. 10. And in the parable of the fig-tree which a man planted in his vineyard, and finding no fruit upon it for three years together, in which it should have borne some, *he said to the dresser of the vineyard, Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground? and he answering said, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it*, (and so do every thing that may make it bear;) *and then if it bear fruit, well; if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down*, Luke xiii. 7, 9. Thus our blessed Saviour seeing a fig-tree, and finding no fruit upon it as he expected, he cursed it, so that it immediately dried up and withered away, Matt. xxi. 19. So here, Christ having *tasted*

death for every man, Heb. ii. 9. every man is capable of attaining eternal life by him, and, by consequence, able to do all things by him that are necessary in order thereunto: but if men will not make use of that grace and strength which he affords them, whereby to bring forth fruit meet for repentance, they can in reason expect no other, but, like fruitless trees, to be cut down and cast into the fire, *into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*: and therefore we had need to look about us, and take heed lest we neglect that grace which is offered to us in the Gospel of Christ. By him *working in us both to will and to do*, we may all *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*: but *if we refuse and rebel*, and notwithstanding all that he hath done, and is always ready to do for us, will still continue to mistrust his promises, and slight the grace which he offers to us, we shall certainly *be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power*; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe in that day, 2 Thess. i. 9, 10. And it will be a great addition to our misery, that we might have been happy if we would, but we would not; we would not make use of Christ's assistance, otherwise we might have done whatsoever was required to make us happy; as St. Paul found by experience, saying, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*. *Through Christ which strengtheneth me*; which words afford us another very remarkable observation: for the apostle doth not say, *I can do all things through Christ which hath strengthened me*, or *which did strengthen me*, by infusing the principles of grace and virtue into my heart at first; but he speaks in the present tense, ἐνδυναμοῦντί με, *which doth strengthen me*: he looks upon Christ as strengthening him continually, assisting him in every thing he spake, or did, or thought; and so ought we to do: we ought to act our faith continually upon our Saviour, that so we may be always deriving power and

virtue from him to eschew evil and do good : we must apply ourselves to him upon all occasions, so as to undertake nothing but in his name, and by his strength. This is that which the apostle expressly commands, saying, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*, Col. iii. 17. This was the course which he himself took, whereby to do all things through Christ which strengthened him : and he would have us take the same course too, if we desire to do all things effectually as he did. When David undertook to fight with Goliath, he did it *in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel*, 1 Sam. xvii. 45. And if we desire to conquer our spiritual enemies, as he did the Philistines, we must set upon them only in the name of Christ, the great Captain of our salvation : and if we would do any thing at all as we ought, we must begin it, carry it on, and finish it only in him : actually believing and trusting on him to assist us in it, and to supply us with such a measure of his grace and holy Spirit, as may be sufficient to carry us through it : as suppose we pray, if we do it in his name, we are sure to be heard ; for we have his own word for it, saying, *Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*, John xvi. 23. The same holds good as to all the actions of our life ; whatsoever we do in his name, be sure is well done, and God for his sake will accept of it : so that by this means we may always live as becometh Christians, and be able to say, as St. Paul did, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*.

And why should not you and I be able to say so, as well as St. Paul ? Christ is our Saviour, as well as his, and both as willing and as able to assist us, as he was to assist him. Why then should not we do all things by Christ, as well as he ? Let us therefore now resolve to do so in good earnest : whatsoever Almighty God requires of us, in order to our serving him while we are

upon earth, and to our living with him hereafter in heaven, let us but set about it in the name of Christ, and we need not fear but by his assistance we shall be able to accomplish it: or rather, we ought not to fear or doubt at all of it, but firmly believe that he, according to his promise, will assist us, and then he will most certainly do it. Let us therefore banish out of our hearts all diffident and unbelieving thoughts of Christ, and put our whole trust and confidence in him to carry us through our whole duty both to God and man: where-soever we are, let us look upon him as present with us; whatsoever we do, let us look upon him as helping us to do it: and for that purpose, let us be constant in performing our private devotions to God in his name; and in his name converse as much as possibly we can with him in his public ordinances, in praying and praising God, in reading and hearing his most holy word; and so we may live under the influences of his blessed Spirit, and have it always with us and in us. Above all, let us take all the opportunities we can get of receiving his most blessed body and blood, to put us in mind of him, to confirm our faith in him, and to draw virtue from him, the fountain of all wisdom and goodness, to make us wise and good. In short, let us but keep our minds and our faith always fixed upon our blessed Saviour, and we shall find, by experience, that he will strengthen and assist us by his grace and holy Spirit, so as that we shall be able to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, and at last obtain everlasting life, through his merits and mediation for us: *to whom, &c.*

S E R M O N C I V .

THE NATURE, EXTENT, AND POLITY OF GOD'S KINGDOM
UPON EARTH.

PSAL. xcvi. 1.

The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.

ALTHOUGH we cannot arrive at the perfection of happiness, till we come into the other world, where we shall be so perfectly holy, that all our inclinations shall centre in God, and so we shall be at perfect rest and quiet; yet, even in this life, we may attain a considerable degree of it, if we would but set ourselves in good earnest about it. For the greatest part of the miseries which we suffer upon earth, are plainly of our own making; in that we suffer ourselves to be tossed to and fro with every wind that blows upon us, ruffled and discomposed at every thing that falls out contrary to our expectation, opinion, or desire, although we have no reason at all for it, our happiness and welfare being no farther concerned in it, than as we make it to be ourselves: for that doth not depend upon any thing that is without us, but is seated only in our minds, which we may, if we will, keep always serene and calm, in the midst of all the storms and tempests that may beat upon us; and so may really be happy in ourselves, notwithstanding any thing that doth or can befall us in this world, if it be not our own faults: I say, our fault, for so certainly it is, and a very great one too, to trouble and torment ourselves, as we

commonly do, without any real cause, and to make ourselves miserable, when we need not be so, yea when we ought not to be so, it being directly contrary to the express command of God, who requires us not to be disturbed or discontented at any thing, but *in every thing to give thanks*, and to *rejoice evermore*, 1 Thess. v. 16, 18. Which are as plain commands as any are in the whole Bible, and therefore ought to be as strictly observed; so that whatsoever happens in the world, how cross soever it may seem to our present designs, or contrary to our corrupt inclinations, we are still bound, not only to bear it patiently, but to be cheerful, and pleasant, and thankful under it. But for that purpose, we must always look beyond the thing itself, and fix our eye upon him that doth it, even upon Almighty God, who is the only object of all true joy and happiness, and who always is so, whether we have or have not any thing else to rejoice in. And therefore we are commanded to *rejoice in the Lord alway*, Phil. iv. 4. which command they plainly break, who either do not rejoice in the Lord at all, or do not always rejoice in him.

But how happy are they who always keep it? Nothing can move or disturb them; for their hearts are always fixed, trusting and rejoicing in him that orders all things; whereby they are not only freed from all those frights and fears, from all those unruly passions and perturbations of mind, which other men are continually subject to, but even in this life they enjoy as much happiness as their imperfect state is capable of, and are in the ready way to attain the perfection of it in the other world.

Now happiness being a thing, which I am confident we all desire, and this being the only way whereby we can ever come at it, I shall endeavour to make it as plain as I can, from the words which I have now read. Wherein for that purpose we shall consider,

I. Whom we are here to understand by the Lord.

II. What by his reigning.

III. How the consideration of this great truth, *The*

Lord reigneth, should make the *earth*, and all the inhabitants thereof, *rejoice* and be *glad* : and so, how the latter part of this verse follows clearly from the former ; *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice ; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof*

The first question, whom we are here to understand by *the Lord*, may seem at first sight to be so very easy, that we need not make any question of it ; it being past all doubt, that by *the Lord*, we are here to understand him whom we otherwise call God. It is true ; but it is one thing to say so, and another to understand what we say when we speak it. And this is altogether as difficult, as the other is easy ; our souls being so depraved and darkened, that we cannot, without great study and application, frame such ideas and conceptions of God in our minds, as are necessary to our right understanding what we say, when we speak of him ; without which our speaking of him will be to no purpose, as having no power or force at all upon our minds.

Hence therefore, in discoursing upon this question, I shall endeavour to shew what kind of thoughts and notions we ought to have of God, that so we may understand what we mean, when we speak of him, who is here called *the Lord*. To which, nothing will contribute more, than a due consideration of the name whereby he is here called, which, in the original, is *Jehovah*, as we commonly pronounce it ; although we are not certain how it ought to be pronounced, it being made up wholly of consonants, without any vowels of its own : for those which are commonly affixed to it, are plainly borrowed from another word, as they who are skilled in that language know full well. Howsoever, that is not so material, as to understand the proper sense and meaning of this great name, whereby Almighty God hath been pleased to reveal and manifest himself unto us : and which he therefore calls his own name, in a more peculiar manner ; *I am the Lord*, saith he, *Jehovah, that is my name*, Isa. xlii. 8. *And they shall know that*

my name is Jehovah, the Lord, Jer. xvi. 21. From whence we may see his meaning, when he said unto Moses, *Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you ; this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations*, Exod. iii. 15. That is, the first, *Jehovah*, or *the Lord*, is my name ; the other, even the *God of your fathers*, is *my memorial*, or that which shall alway put me in mind of the covenant which I have made with your fathers. And hence it is, that this is called **שם** *the name*, Lev. xxiv. 11. as far exceeding all other names, as being proper and peculiar only to the true God. Other things are sometimes called Gods, but nothing is or can be called *Jehovah* but only the almighty Creator of the world. *That men may know*, saith David, *that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth*, Psal. lxxxiii. 18.

But to understand the proper meaning of this name, and what kind of thoughts it suggests to our minds concerning God, it will be necessary to consider the etymology, and the common use of it in holy writ. As for the etymology, it plainly comes from a word that signifies *to be* in general ; and therefore the most high God, calling himself by this name, even *Jehovah*, he thereby gives us to understand, that he would not have us to apprehend him as any *particular* or *limited being*, but as *Being* in general, as the *universal Being* of the world, that gives essence and existence unto all things in it. And hence it is, that when Moses asked God his name, he said, *I AM THAT I AM* ; and *thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*, Exod. iii. 14. He doth not say, I am this or that particular thing, but in general, *I AM*, and *I AM THAT I AM*. Whereby he plainly interprets his great name *Jehovah*, which may be accordingly rendered in the third Person, *He is*, or

Being itself, without any restriction or limitation ; or, as St. John explains it, ὁ ὢν, ὁ ἦν, καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, *who is, who was, and who is to come*, Rev. i. 4. Where, though he useth several words, yet he useth all but as one name of God, (as is plain from the Greek,) and that can be no other than *Jehovah*, which signifies all that is contained in those words ; and which was therefore rightly interpreted by the Greek philosophers, ὁ ὢν and τὸ ὄν. And I know not how we can better render it in English, than by *the Being*.

But why then do our translators always render it *the Lord* ? The reason is, because the Septuagint, or seventy learned men that first translated the Old Testament, or at least the Pentateuch, out of Hebrew into Greek, wheresoever they met with this great name of God, *Jehovah*, they always rendered it by Κύριος, which being derived from κύρω, *to be*, was the most proper word in all the Greek language, whereby to express the true meaning of it. But this word Κύριος being, in process of time, used to signify a lord or governor ; and being so used also in other places, both of the Old and New Testament, therefore our translators also, all along, render *Jehovah*, by *the Lord*. But that the reader may always know when it is the proper name of God, they took care, that whensoever *Jehovah* was used in the original text, *the Lord* is always written in capitals or great letters ; so that whensoever you read the Lord so written, you may conclude that it signifies *Jehovah*, (which is more than can be said of any other translation that ever I saw or heard of :) as in my text, *the Lord*, you see, is written all in great letters, which shews that in the original it is, *Jehovah reigneth* : and so all over the Old Testament. But wheresoever the original hath any other word that signifies a lord, there *Lord* is always written in smaller characters, on purpose to distinguish it from *Jehovah*.

But for our better understanding the meaning of this great name *Jehovah*, there are several things much to

be observed in the use of it all along in the holy writ : as first, that it is never used with any genitive case after it, except *sabaoth*, or hosts. He is never called *Jehovah*, the Lord of angels, of men, of heaven, of earth, but always simply, or absolutely, *Jehovah, the Lord*. It is true, in this very Psalm he is called *the Lord of all the whole earth*, ver. 5. But in the original it is not *Jehovah*, but אלהים, and therefore it is written in smaller characters, as other words are, not as in my text, where the Lord is written all in great letters ; to shew, as I observed before, that the Hebrew word is *Jehovah*, which signifying *Being* in general, cannot properly have any particular genitive case after it ; for that would restrain it to some particular thing ; as if he should be called *Jehovah*, the Being of the earth, that would imply as if he himself was the very Being of the earth, or at least, as if he gave being to that in a more particular manner than to any thing else ; whereas he equally gives being to every thing that is, and is himself not the being or essence of any thing, but Being in general, the Being of all beings. And that is the reason why, although he is never called *Jehovah, the Lord* of any thing else, yet he is frequently called, *the Lord of hosts*, or *sabaoth*, because *sabaoth*, or *hosts*, most properly signifies all things ; all things in the world, in their several ranks and orders, being as so many hosts or armies, which he, as Generalissimo, commands and governs. And hence it is, that Plato seems to have borrowed that notion of God, when he called him ὁ ὄντων, the Being of beings ; that being the most proper signification of this divine expression, *The Lord of hosts*.

But here we may farther observe, that although *Jehovah* hath *sabaoth*, or *hosts*, often following, yet it is never changed according to the idiom of the Hebrew tongue in the like cases. For when any other word hath a genitive case following it, (especially such as end in ך, as this doth,) it admits of some variation at the end of it, whereby it is known to have so ; whereas this

never admits of any, but is always just the same, where-soever it occurs ; as God himself is, whatsoever he doth ; which shews, that this name is properly adapted, and used in a peculiar manner, to represent him to us, with whom is no variableness or shadow of change.

Another thing worthy our observation in this name is, that it is always used by itself, without any adjective joined with it. God is often called a wise, a merciful, an almighty, eternal God, but never a wise, a merciful, an almighty, an eternal Jehovah, but absolutely Jehovah, the Lord, at least in the original ; and if it be otherwise in any translation, it is certainly a great mistake : and the reason is, because every adjective implies something added to the word it is joined with ; whereas nothing can be added to *Jehovah*, all properties and perfections whatsoever being fully contained in the word itself : for that signifying, as I have observed, *Being* in general, it must needs comprehend under it wisdom, and power, and greatness, and glory, and goodness, and justice, and mercy, and immensity, and eternity, and all other perfections that are, or have any being at all. And therefore it would be very improper, to add any one or more of them to that name under which they are all contained ; except it be unity itself, which doth not signify any particular property, but the absolute perfection of the divine Essence itself, and its identity and equality in the three persons which subsist in it : as where it is said, *Hear, O Israel ; The Lord our God is one Lord*, Deut. vi. 4. Where the word אלהים, which we translate *God*, being in the plural number, plainly signifies the three persons, of which it is here said, that they are *one Lord, one Jehovah, one Being* ; that is, although they be distinguished from each other by their personal properties, yet they have all one and the same individual essence. And hence it is that all and every one of them are equally called *Jehovah*, the Lord ; even the Son and the Holy Ghost, as well as the Father. As Jer. xxiii. 6. it is said, that the Saviour of the world

shall be called יְהוָה צְדִיקוֹ, *The Lord our righteousness*, which can be understood of none but the Son, *who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness*, 1 Cor. i. 30. and who is therefore expressly called *the Lord*: and so he is in many other places of the Old Testament. And as for the Holy Ghost, the prophets all along call him the Lord; saying, *Thus saith the Lord*: for seeing they *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, 2 Pet. i. 21 it must needs be he whom they call the Lord, whensoever they use that divine expression.

And besides, he is called *one Lord* also, in respect of the properties or perfections which are commonly attributed to him. For although, as I observed before, he is never called a wise, a merciful, an almighty Jehovah, nor hath this name any other adjective, except *one*, ever joined with it; yet these and all other perfections are usually predicated upon it; so that it is often said, that Jehovah is wise, and merciful, and almighty, and good, and just, and eternal, and the like. But howsoever these perfections are severally attributed to him; yet really, as they are in him, they are himself, one Lord, one Being. And all the difference or distinction there is betwixt them, is only in our different apprehension of this one Being; which acting severally upon several objects, we apprehend it as acting from several properties, by reason of the finiteness of our understandings, which cannot conceive of an infinite Being, wholly as it is in itself, but as it were by piecemeal, as it represents itself to us: whereas, if we could look upon God as he is in himself, we should see all perfections whatsoever so centred in him, that they are all one and the same perfection; and so he is still, simply and absolutely, without any mixture or composition, *one Jehovah, one Lord*.

I shall observe only one thing more at present concerning this great name, and that is, that although God never promiseth to be Jehovah to us, nor is ever called

our Lord, but only our God, yet he often makes use of this name to confirm what he saith or promiseth to his people, saying, *I am the Lord*: as we see all along both in Moses and the prophets. And this doubtless is the highest asseveration that can be made of any truth: for when God saith, *I am the Lord*, it is as much as if he should say, What I now say is as certain as that I am the Lord; and I who say it, being the Lord, Being itself, whatsoever I say must needs be just as I say it; so that it is absolutely impossible it should be otherwise. And thus he himself interprets it, saying, *I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed*, Mal. iii. 6. that is, I being the Lord, I cannot change, and therefore what I say cannot but be as I say it shall: and that is the reason why ye sons of Jacob are not consumed, because I have promised ye shall not be consumed, and have confirmed that promise by my great name, saying, *I am the Lord*.

This observation duly considered will give great light to many obscure places, and particularly to that where we read, *And God said unto Moses, I am the Lord. And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty; but by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them*, Exod. vi. 2, 3. That which makes this place so difficult is, because this name of God, *Jehovah*, was certainly known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for God often used it when he spake to them, and they too when they spake to him. How then could it be here said, *by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them*? To understand this, we may consider, that when God entered into covenant with Abraham, he said unto him, *אני אל שדי, I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect. As for me, behold my covenant is with thee*, &c. Gen. xvi. 1, 2. Where he plainly useth this expression, *אני אל שדי, I am God Almighty*, to confirm his covenant, that Abraham might more firmly believe that he was able to perform what he promised, seeing

he was God Almighty. Before this, God had said to Abraham, *I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees*, Gen. xv. 7. And afterwards he said to Jacob, *I am the Lord God of thy father Abraham, and the God of Isaac, the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed*, Gen. xxviii. 13. In both which places, though he uses this expression, *I am the Lord*, yet he adds something else to it, to make up the proposition; and we never find it used by itself, for the confirmation of what he said, till the place above mentioned, Exod. vi. 2. Where God first of all saith, *I am Jehovah*, or, *I am the Lord*. And therefore the meaning of what follows must needs be this, that God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so as to confirm his promise to them, by saying, *I am God Almighty*; but not by his name Jehovah, saying, *I am Jehovah*, or, *I am the Lord*, as he doth now to the children of Israel. So that though they did know this to be his name, yet they did not know that God would establish his covenant with them by it, as he doth now, saying, *I am the Lord*. And I am the more induced to believe this to be the true meaning of the place, because God is pleased both to begin and end what he here promiseth, by this expression. And though it was never used before, yet from this time forward, nothing is more frequent, both in Moses and the Prophets, than for God to confirm what he saith to his people, by saying, *I am the Lord*.

From what we have hitherto briefly discoursed concerning this great and glorious name, whereby the most high God is pleased to reveal himself to us in his holy word, and particularly in my text, calling himself *Jehovah, the Lord*, we may easily gather what kind of thoughts he would have us, his creatures, entertain in our minds concerning him; that when we think of him, we must raise our thoughts above all things else, and think of him as the universal Being of the world, that gives essence and existence to all things in it: as *Jehovah*, the Being, in whom we particularly, as well as

other things, live, and move, and have our being : as Jehovah, the Lord-paramount over the whole world, to whom all the angels and archangels in heaven, with all the kings and kingdoms upon earth, are entirely subject : as Jehovah, in whom all perfections are so perfectly united, that they are all but one infinite perfection : as Jehovah, knowledge itself, always actually knowing all things that ever were, or are, or will be, or can be known : as Jehovah, wisdom itself, always contriving, ordering, and disposing of all, and every thing, in the best order, after the best manner, and to the best end that is possible : as Jehovah, power, omnipotence itself, continually doing what he will, only by willing it should be done, and always working either with means, or without means, as he himself sees good. As Jehovah, light and glory itself, shining forth in, and by, and through every thing that is made or done in the whole world : as Jehovah, holiness, purity, simplicity, greatness, majesty, eminency, supereminency itself, infinitely exalted above all things else, existing in and of himself, and having all things else continually subsisting in him : as Jehovah, goodness itself, doing and making all things good, and so communicating itself to all his creatures, as to be the only fountain of all the goodness that is in any of them : as Jehovah, justice and righteousness itself, giving to all their due, and exacting no more of any, than what is absolutely due to him : as Jehovah, mercy itself, pardoning and forgiving all the sins that mankind commit against him, so soon as they repent and turn to him : as Jehovah, patience and longsuffering itself, bearing a long time, even with those who continue in their rebellions against him, waiting for their coming to a due sense of their folly and madness, that he may be gracious and merciful to them : as Jehovah, love, and kindness, and bounty itself, freely distributing his blessings among all his creatures, both good and bad, just and unjust, those that love him, and those that love him not : as Jehovah, truth and faithfulness itself,

always saying as he means, always doing what he saith, always performing what he promiseth to his people: as Jehovah, infinitude, immensity itself, in all things, to all things, beyond all things, every where wholly, essentially, continually present: as Jehovah, constancy, immutability, eternity itself, without any variableness, or shadow of change; yesterday, to-day, and for ever the same. In a word, when we think of the most high God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we should think of him as Jehovah, Unity in Trinity, Trinity in Unity, three Persons, one Being, one Essence, one Lord, one Jehovah, blessed for ever. This is that glorious, that almighty Being, which the Psalmist here means, when he saith, *The Lord reigneth*.

The word in the original, מֶלֶךְ, which we translate *reigneth*, is commonly used to signify the exercise of supreme authority and power; especially that which is originally and most eminently in God himself, who is therefore frequently said to reign. As, *The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength*, Psal. xciii. 1. *The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble*, Psal. xcix. 1. And this is that which he would have all people take special notice of, *Say ye among the heathen, The Lord reigneth*, Psal. xcvi. 10. But the word is commonly used also of sovereign princes and emperors upon earth, who derive their titles from it, being called מַלְכִּים, persons that reign, or, as we translate it, *kings*. And therefore God himself is pleased to call himself *a great King*, Psal. xcv. 3. *the King of glory*, or the glorious King, Psal. xxiv. 8, 9, 10. and absolutely, *the King*. *Mine eyes*, saith the prophet, *have seen the King, the Lord of hosts*, Isa. vi. 5. And our blessed Saviour hath taught us to acknowledge this in our daily prayers to God, saying, *For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Thine is the kingdom*, thou reignest in a more special and peculiar manner, than any other persons can be said to do. *Thine is the kingdom*, so as

that in comparison with thee, none else can be said to reign at all.

But that we may the better understand the nature of this kingdom, and so in what sense it is here said, that *the Lord reigneth*; we shall, by his assistance, consider,

1. The extent of it.
2. The title he hath to reign over it.
3. The laws whereby he governs it.
4. The form of its government, or the way and manner whereby he reigns over it.

First, therefore, this kingdom over which the Lord reigneth is of very large extent, for it is spread over the face of the whole earth: as king David himself confesseth, saying, *God is the King of all the earth*, Psal. xlvii. 7. and xcvii. 5. So that all the kingdoms, states, empires, and commonwealths that are in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, or in the unknown parts of the earth, they are all but parcels of God's kingdom, who disposeth of them, and sets over them whom he pleaseth: as Daniel told king Nebuchadnezzar, that God *removeth kings, and setteth up kings*, Dan. ii. 21. And so did the holy One that appeared to him, acquainting him, *that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will*, chap. iv. 17. Yea, God himself asserts the same thing to his own people, by his prophet, saying, *I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath*, Hos. xiii. 11. From whence it appears, that all the kings and emperors upon earth, although they be sovereign princes in respect of one another, yet they are all subject to the Lord of hosts, and hold their crowns and sceptres of him, and that too only during his pleasure. They are all but his vicegerents, or deputies, receiving their power and commission wholly from him; and therefore are bound to do him homage, both for the kingdoms over which they reign, and for all the authority they have, or can exercise in them. *By me*, saith he, *kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and*

nobles, even all the judges of the earth, Prov. viii. 15, 16. They are all but his commissioners, and as he gives, so he can take away their commissions when he will : and while they hold it, they hold it so perfectly under him, that they cannot go beyond it if they would : for *the hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord ; as the rivers of water, he turneth them whithersoever he will*, Prov. xxi. 1. Though he puts great power into their hands, yet he holds both them and their hearts too, so that they cannot design, much less execute, any thing beyond their commission : as our Lord himself told Pilate, saying, *Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above*, John xix. 11. And therefore no people upon earth are in such perfect subjection and vassalage to their princes, as their princes are to Almighty God, who hath absolute dominion over their souls, as well as their bodies : for *he cuts off, or refrains, the spirit of princes, and is terrible to the kings of the earth*, Psal. lxxvi. 12. And hence it is that he is called *the King of kings, and the Lord of lords*, 1 Tim. vi. 15. Rev. i. and xix. 16. because all the kings upon earth are his subjects, and their kingdoms but part of his.

Yea, and but a very small part too ; for his kingdom is not confined to the earth, but reaches as high as heaven, and spreads itself over the whole world. Indeed, heaven is the chief seat of his kingdom ; as he himself saith, *Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool*, Isa. lxvi. 1. So that this part of his kingdom exceeds the other, as much as the throne a king sits on exceeds the footstool whereon he stands. And so it doth, not only in respect of the quantity, the earth being but a very little inconsiderable thing in comparison of heaven ; but likewise in respect of the quality of it : for as there are an innumerable company of inhabitants in heaven, the least of them excels the greatest kings and emperors upon earth in power and glory, they being all endowed with all the perfections that creatures are capable of ;

perfectly wise and prudent, perfectly good and holy, perfectly pure and happy. There are angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, all most mighty, most excellent, most glorious princes indeed : and yet they are all subject to this almighty King, the Lord. They are but his ministers of state, waiting continually upon him, and performing their homage to him, by prostrating themselves before him, and being ready upon all occasions to receive and execute his commands ; as we learn from the holy Spirit of God, saying, by David, *Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word*, Psal. ciii. 20. Hence they are called λειτουργικά πνεύματα, *ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*, Heb. i. 14. and are charged to keep such in all their ways, Psal. xci. 11. It is true, this may seem to us but a mean employment for such glorious creatures as they are ; but howsoever, they do it with all the cheerfulness and alacrity imaginable, looking upon every thing as great that God commands, and accounting themselves happy to be employed by him in any thing. And therefore they live in perfect obedience and subjection to him, without ever neglecting or transgressing any of his commands, but doing every thing just as he would have it done ; by which means they always enjoy his love and favour, and have the light of his countenance shining continually upon them ; and so are as happy as it is possible for creatures to be. And though their number be vastly great of themselves, so great, that I question whether they themselves can reckon it up ; yet it is very much augmented by the spirits of just men, who departing out of this life, in the true faith and fear of God, are made equal to them, and fellow-subjects with them in this kingdom of heaven, over which the Lord reigneth.

But many of those who were at first planted in the kingdom of heaven, rebelled against their almighty

King ; who therefore banished them from thence, and *hath reserved them in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day*, Jude 6. These therefore being thus condemned to the infernal pit, constitute there a kind of a kingdom, or rather a conspiracy and combination of wicked spirits, of so great power and malice, that they are called *principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickednesses in high places*, Eph. vi. 12. and *the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience*, chap. ii. 2. Now these go about daily seeking whom they may devour, doing all they can to keep mankind in darkness, entice them into sin, or withdraw them from their duty to God. But though they go about for these wicked purposes, they always go in chains, fettered and hampered by the Lord, so that they can do nothing without his order or permission, who employs them only as his executioners, to execute his judgments upon impenitent and obdurate sinners like themselves. But he still keeps so strict a rein over them, that they cannot stir a jot farther than he suffereth them. They could not meddle with Job's goods till they had obtained a licence from God, nor with his body afterwards until their licence was enlarged, Job i. and ii. yea, a whole legion of them could not so much as enter into swine without Christ's leave, Mark v. 12. which plainly shews, that although it be against their wills, yet they are kept in perfect subjection to the Lord, Jehovah, who reigneth as absolutely over them as any other creatures whatsoever. And they certainly of themselves are very many ; and yet their number also is increased by a great part of mankind, who dying in their sins, are condemned to live for ever in the company of these fiends of hell ; whereby this kingdom of darkness, though it be not so great as that of light, it is doubtless of vast extent ; and yet nevertheless it is but one part of that over which the Lord reigneth.

For he reigneth not only over all the kingdoms of men, of holy and of apostate angels, but likewise over all things else: as David in his prayer to him confesseth, saying, *Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both honour and riches come of thee, and thou reignest over all*, 1 Chron. xxix. 12. He reigneth over all, not only rational, but mere sensitive and inanimate creatures too, and doth whatsoever he will with all, and every one of them. *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he*, saith David, *in heaven, in the earth, in the seas, and in all deep places*, Psal. cxxxv. 6. And good reason why he should do what he will with every thing; for all things are his. *The earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is; the compass of the world, and they that dwell therein*, Psal. xxiv. 1. The earth is of itself of very great extent, being commonly reckoned to be above twenty-one thousand miles round: and it hath a vast company of beasts living upon it, birds flying about it, fishes swimming in its waters, insects creeping on its plants, stones, metals, semi-metals, minerals, and many other things engendered in its bowels, from the surface to the centre; which are all under the inspection and care of Almighty God, who orders and disposeth of them as he pleaseth: and this one would think was a very large kingdom for one to reign over. But what then shall we think of the prodigious compass of the heavens? What vast bodies are the sun, and moon, and stars that are in it? What a vast number is there of them? And what a vast space is there between them, and beyond them too? Who can think of this without astonishment and admiration? And yet all this is the Lord's; and so the system of the whole world is his, and all and every thing that is in it belongs to that kingdom, over which, as it is here said, *the Lord reigneth*.

And certainly he hath all the right and title in the world to reign over the world, and all things in it, seeing the world and all things in it were made by him, as

appears from the first words of the Bible, *In the beginning God created heaven and earth*, Gen. i. 1. where by *heaven and earth*, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, is meant the *whole world and all things in it*. It was all created by God in the beginning, and by consequence out of nothing: for though we should grant that the Hebrew word בְּרָא, which we translate *created*, doth not always signify the production of a thing out of nothing, yet that must needs be the meaning of it in this place: for if there had been any thing before, out of which the world was made, there must have been a beginning before; and then it could not have been said, that *In the beginning God created heaven and earth*. But it is expressly said, that he did it in the beginning, and therefore it could be no otherwise than out of nothing: and this is the first great truth that God is pleased to reveal unto us in his holy word, as being the foundation of all true religion; the grand reason of that obedience, subjection, and homage which all creatures owe to God, being grounded upon this, that they are created or produced out of nothing by him; they are his creatures, and therefore must needs be subject to him, and do what he commands, from whom they receive their being, and all the power they have of doing any thing. This is the reason which David gives, why *the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*; because *he founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods*, Psal. xxiv. 1, 2. he made it, therefore it is wholly his: and if it be his, it must needs be at his command, he may do with it what he pleaseth. The same may be said of the whole world, it is all the workmanship of his hands, and therefore is wholly under his care and government.

Especially, considering that he did not only make all things at first, but continually preserveth and *upholdeth all things* in their being, by the same almighty word whereby he made them, Heb. i. 3. He made all things at first, by saying they should be; and so he continueth

all things in their being, by saying or willing they should continue. He said, *Let there be light, and there was light* : and should he once say, let there be no light, there would be no light, but all the lights of heaven would immediately go out, and darkness would overspread the face of the whole world. Yea, should God but cease to keep any thing in its being, or not actually will it to be, it would, in the twinkling of an eye, fall down to nothing, or soon cease to be. Hence the apostle saith, that *in him we live, and move, and have our being*, Acts xvii. 28. It is in him we live ; for it was he that breathed the breath of life into us, and so united our souls to our bodies ; and it is he that keeps them so united. It is he that gives us food, and it is he that gives his blessing unto it, that it may nourish and preserve us alive : it is in him we move either our souls or bodies : it is in him that we understand, or think, or choose, or love, or hate, or exercise any other passion : it is in him that we walk, or stir either our heads, or hands, or feet, or any other part of our body : yea, it is in him that we are, or have our very being ; so that we cannot subsist, or be one moment without him ; but we, and all the creatures in the world, depend continually upon him, and are continually beholden to him, not only for what we have, and for what we are, but for that we are at all. And seeing all things thus continually derive their very being from him, he must needs have absolute power and dominion over all things. And this is the reason which the choir of heaven gives, why the Lord deserves to reign so gloriously as he doth over the whole world ; saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power ; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created*, Rev. iv. 11. As if they should have said, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to reign over all things, and to be glorified and honoured by all things ; because all things were not only created by thee, but all things continually are or subsist in thee : yea, all

things are both made and preserved, διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου, for thy pleasure, or rather for thy will, because thou wouldest have it so. So that both the first production of all things out of nothing, and the continual preservation of them in their being, depends wholly and solely upon the will of God, and therefore must needs be subject to him.

But why did God make all things ? *He did it*, as the Wise-man saith, *for himself, for his own sake*, Prov. xvi. 4. that is, for the exercise and manifestation of himself. He was infinitely happy in himself before he made the world, and therefore could have no other end in making of it, but only that he might thereby communicate of his goodness, and shew forth his glory unto others ; which, for that purpose, he made capable of beholding what he hath done, and of reflecting upon that infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness, which he exerted in the doing of it. And for the same end it is, that he is still pleased to support and maintain all things in their being, that so his glory might continually shine forth in them, and be acknowledged, admired, and praised by all that see it. But this end could not be accomplished, unless he always reigned over all things : for if he did not, some things might fall out otherwise than he designed at first, and so would not answer the end wherefore he made them ; whereas, by reigning over the world, he so orders and disposeth of every thing in it, that all things concur to promote his great and holy design, by setting forth the glory of his divine perfections. And therefore it must needs be acknowledged, that there is all the reason in the world, that he should reign over all things in the world, that so he may accomplish his end in the making and preserving of them.

Which brings me to the next thing I promised to shew, by what laws the Lord governs the world, or, as it is here expressed, *reigneth over it*. Concerning which, we may observe in general, that they are all such as he in his infinite wisdom saw necessary to be enacted, in

order to the better discovery of himself, and the displaying his glory in the world ; which was his end, as in making and preserving all things, so likewise in his prescribing laws for every thing to observe : for which purpose therefore he gave certain rules and orders to all things he made, at the same time and after the same manner that he made them, even by his word : as we see in the first of Genesis ; where we must distinguish betwixt his saying, *let such a thing be*, and *let such a thing do*, so or so. By the first, he produced the thing out of nothing ; by the other, he gave laws to it, then in being. As when he said, *Let there be light* : by that word, the light, which was not before, began to be ; but when he said, *Let there be lights in the firmament, to divide the day from the night ; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years*, ver. 14. he thereby gave laws to the light he had before made, where he would have it be, and what he would have it do. And so, when he said, *Let the earth bring forth grass and herbs, yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed is in itself, after his kind*, ver. 11. and, *Let the earth bring forth the living creatures after their kind*, ver. 24. he thereby laid his command upon the earth, by virtue whereof it was both empowered and required to bring forth grass, and every living creature after his kind : and so it hath done ever since. The same may be said of all other parts of the creation ; for the almighty Creator, at the same time that he created any thing, signified his pleasure what he would have it to be, or to do. And this is that which we call the law of nature ; that law which God hath put into the nature of every thing, whereby it always keeps itself within such bounds, and acts according to such rules, as God hath set it ; and by that means sets forth the glory of his wisdom and power, and therefore may be properly said to praise or glorify him. Hence it is that David saith, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his*

handy work, Psal. xix. 1. And elsewhere, *Praise the Lord, ye sun and moon ; praise him, all ye stars of light ; praise him, ye heaven of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord ; for he commanded, and they were created. He hath established them for ever and ever : he hath made a decree, which shall not pass*, Psal. cxlviii. 3, 4, 5, 6. That is, he hath so ordered the nature of such things, and decreed such laws to be observed by them, as shall never be broken, but shall always be punctually observed by them ; for otherwise what would become of the world ? If the sun, for example, should cease to give its light ; if the earth should cease to bring forth grass ; if animals should cease to increase and multiply ; the whole frame of the creation would immediately be unhinged, the world would cease to be what it is, and become a mere chaos again, a dark confused heap, without any form or order, and so would not answer the end of its creation : for the prevention whereof, God hath so firmly established this law of nature in all inanimate and mere sensible creatures, that it can never be altered, but all things naturally move and act continually, just as he at first designed and ordained they should.

But all these sorts of creatures, although they are, every one in its place and station, great monuments of the divine perfections, exerted in the framing and government of them ; yet they themselves do not know it, not being endued with any such principle, whereby to reflect either upon themselves, or him that made them : so that if there had been no other sorts of creatures made, none but God himself could have seen his glory shining in them. Hence therefore he was pleased to make other creatures of such a nature, as to be able to understand, acknowledge, and admire his divine wisdom, and goodness, and power, both in themselves, and in all other creatures which he hath made : and they are angels and men.

Of which; the first are purely intellectual or spiritual creatures, endued with power to understand and consider both the works and the commands of God, to distinguish between good and bad, what he would have them do, and what not to do, and to prefer and choose the one before the other: to whom he hath therefore given another kind of laws suitable to their nature, requiring them to consider and contemplate upon what he hath done; to acknowledge and admire the divine perfections which he exercised in the doing of it; and to love, and honour, and praise, and glorify him for all the goodness, and the wonderful works that he hath shewed to them; and to be ready upon all occasions, not only to do what he commands, but to do it in pure obedience to him: all which, the greatest part of these glorious creatures have always punctually observed; and so have always continued in his love and favour. But some of them, swelling with the conceit of their great power, and abusing it so far as to transgress his laws, were immediately disgraced, and cast into prison, into the pit of hell; where, although they never willingly obey his commands, yet their hands are so tied, that they can do nothing but what he permits them. By which means, they also live under some kind of government, though against their wills; being so confined and restrained by Almighty God, that they can never go beyond the bounds which he hath set them.

The other sort of creatures which God hath made capable of apprehending, respecting, and owning him in all that he hath made or done, are men, partly spiritual, and partly earthly creatures; being angels, as it were, incorporated, or spirits united to matter, so as to make one person with it: and these God was pleased so to compose and put together, that the soul, or spiritual part, might always govern and rule over the body, or sensitive part; and so be always employed, as the holy angels are, in loving and trusting on God, in rejoicing in him, adoring, admiring, and praising, and giving him

thanks for his great glory and goodness, and the rest of his perfections; and in imitating of him, as near as their finite capacities would reach, in being just, and merciful, and pure, and holy, and perfect, as he is. And so long as man continued in this state, he needed no other revelation of his duty, his own natural constitution inclining him continually to think, and speak, and do as God would have him. And although by the fall of the first man, the nature of man in general be very much disordered, and out of tune; yet there is so much still left of the first disposition, that they who have no other law, are still *a law unto themselves*, in that they *do by nature the things contained in the law*, and thereby shew *the law is written in their hearts*, as the apostle observes, Rom. ii. 14, 15. But this law written upon the fleshly tables of man's heart, being so blotted and defaced by the fall, that none could read and understand it perfectly; God was afterwards pleased to transcribe it upon two tables of stone, in that which we now call the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, all which are plainly nothing but a transcript of that law which was first inscribed in man's nature, except the fourth, or last of the first table, which God was pleased to add to the other three, by a positive command: and that seems to be the reason wherefore he requires us to remember that, saying, *Remember the sabbath-day to keep it holy*; which is more than he saith concerning any other of his commandments; because, that not being written in the heart, but only proclaimed in their ears, mankind might be apt to forget it, unless they had a particular caution to remember it, at the return of every seventh day, that God had commanded to keep it holy. Whereas the other being only written in our natures, we could not be said properly to remember, but to be sensible of them, or conscious to ourselves that we ought to observe them, whether we are ever put in mind of them by any one else, or no: for if we do but look into our hearts, we may there see, or rather feel

ourselves bound to love and serve God, to honour our parents, and the like. But though all people have some such sense of their duty left them, yet generally it is so little, that it doth not put them upon the practice of it. And hence it is, that God promiseth in the new covenant to quicken and actuate it, saying, *I will put my law in their inward part, and write it in their heart*, Jer. xxxi. 33. That is, he will write his law in our hearts, as he did first, by giving us so quick and strong a sense of our duty to him, as shall excite and stir us up to the sincere performance of it; which he doth by expounding it to us in the Old and New Testament, and by his holy Spirit co-operating with the means of grace, which, for that purpose, he hath settled in his church. By this law, thus written at first upon their hearts, and then upon two tables of stone, and explained in the Old Testament by the prophets, in the New by Christ and his apostles; by this law, I say, it is, that God governs and will judge mankind; and therefore by it he may be properly said to reign over this lower world, the earth, and all the inhabitants thereof.

The next thing I promised to consider is, the form of that government which the Lord exerciseth; how and after what manner it is that he reigns over the world. Which I must confess to be a very hard question, yea, impossible to be perfectly resolved by any, much more by us in our imperfect state; every thing relating to this divine government being matter of wonder, rather than of discourse, and ratiocination. For it is not like the government of any city, or nation, or kingdom upon earth, but quite of another nature; and that too, so high, mysterious, and divine, that although we be continually subject to it, we can apprehend but very little of it. David himself, in this very place, having asserted, that *the Lord reigneth*, he adds in the next verse, that *clouds and darkness are round about him*; intimating that he reigns so insensibly and unintelligibly to us, that we are all in the dark about

the way and manner of his reigning : insomuch that the great apostle himself, considering his wonderful way of working in the world, was forced to cry out ^{ᾠ βάθος,} *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !* Rom. xi. 33. Which may be truly asserted, not only of the amazing revolutions of kingdoms and empires, and other great affairs of the world, but even of those which we think little and common : for those things which seem little or common to us, are managed and ordered by the same infinite wisdom and power, that ordereth and manageth the greatest and rarest things in the world, yea the whole world itself. And could we take a fair prospect of them, we should see the same divine perfections shining forth in one thing as well as another. But, alas ! we are so short-sighted, that we can perceive but very little of the most plain and obvious things that are before us ; and at the best, but only the surface, and some few circumstances belonging to them. We cannot look so far as into the nature of any one thing, much less behold the rare contexture and dependence of one thing upon another ; how every thing concurs to the preservation of all things, and all things to the good of every thing. Least of all are we able to reach so high as to behold the hand that moves this great chain of second causes, so as to make all and every thing produce what he pleaseth : and if we offer at it, we are presently at a loss, amazed, confounded at the infinite height of it, and his wonderful ways of working together with all things so infinitely below him. And therefore expect not that I should give you any particular account of God's way and method in governing the world ; or how it is that he reigns over it : but you must content yourselves with such general notions of it, as may affect your hearts with joy and gladness for it ; such as these,

1. He reigns absolutely, without control, receiving his power from none, nor being accountable to any for

the exercise of it : for he hath it immediately from himself, or rather he hath it all originally, essentially in himself : his power being indeed the same with his will ; so that he doth whatsoever he will, only by willing it should be done. And therefore the apostle saith, *Who hath resisted his will ?* Rom. ix. 19. None certainly ever did or can resist it : for there can be no resistance without power to make it, but there is no power but what comes from God ; and therefore none be sure can ever be exerted against him : but, as the Psalmist saith, *he doth whatsoever he pleaseth*, Psal. cxv. 3. There is no withstanding or gainsaying of him, all things being absolutely subject to his will and pleasure ; as the apostle intimates, where he saith, *Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour ?* Rom. ix. 21. *And who art thou, O man, that repliest against God ? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ?* ver. 20. And the prophet, *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker ! Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou ? or thy work, He hath no hands ?* Isa. xlv. 9. implying, that God hath as much power over every creature, as a potter hath over the clay in his hand, to make what he will of it, and to do what he will with it : as much did I say ? yea, he hath infinitely more, all things in the whole world being so perfectly at his command, that nothing can so much as subsist one moment without him.

And hence it is, that as he reigns absolutely over all things, so likewise over every thing particularly. For we must not apprehend him as residing only in heaven, and from thence issuing forth his commands and commissions for the exercise of his authority in other parts of his kingdom, as earthly princes are forced to do from the place of their residence : no, although he is pleased

to unveil himself, and shine forth in all his glory, more especially in the highest heavens, yet he himself is actually present in every part of his kingdom, in one as well as another, and exerciseth his power in and over every thing that is in particular, as well as over all things that are in general; insomuch that no one thing ever did, or ever can happen in the world, without his immediate order or permission: as we may see in those things which seem to us to be mere contingencies, or to fall out by chance, as we say, as not seeing any necessary cause why they should so happen; yet to God there is no such thing, for he himself concurs to the effecting of it. What can depend more upon chance and contingency, than the decision of a matter by casting of lots? and yet the Wise-man tells us, *that the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing of it is of the Lord*, Prov. xvi. 33. And therefore, when the land of Canaan was *divided by lot* among the tribes of Israel, God himself is said to have divided it; for it was he that gave to every one his inheritance, Acts xiii. 19. Thus when a man is cleaving wood, and the head of his axe happens to fall off, and kill his neighbour, this may be truly brought in chance-medley, and yet it is expressly said, that *God delivered him* that was slain into the other's hand, Exod. xxi. 13. Deut. xix. 5. Many instances of the like nature might be produced to prove it; but we need go no further to make it plain and undeniable, than to the words of our blessed Saviour, where he saith, *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered*, Matt. x. 29, 30. For if every motion of every bird in the air be ordered, and every hair of every man's head be numbered by Almighty God, what can be, or move, or happen in the whole world, without his special care and providence? Nothing certainly; but we may, and ought most certainly to conclude that he

reigns over the world, so as to order and dispose of every particular thing that happens in it, according to his own will and pleasure.

But whatsoever is according to God's will, be sure is good: for his will is always consonant to his infinite wisdom, whereby he contrives all things for the best, in the best manner, and to the best end that can be. But the best end that can be, is his own glory. This is that he propounded to himself in the creation of the world: for he *made all things for himself*, Prov. xvi. 4. that is, for the setting forth his own glory: and to this end every thing he made did conduce in the highest manner that it was possible for it to do, and therefore was the best that it was possible for it to be. And hence, when he had finished the creation, it is said, that *God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good*, Gen. i. 31. that is, every thing was the best in its kind that could be, as contributing as much as it could to the manifestation of his glory, and therefore such as he would have it to be. And the same may be said of every thing that he still doth; it is all very good, as most effectually tending to the great end for which he doth it. It is true, there are many things happen in the world which we can assign no reason for, but wonder how and why they come to pass; but he that is the first and supreme cause of them most certainly designs some great good by them, and makes them as certainly to produce it: insomuch that if any one thing should happen otherwise than it doth, it would doubtless be much worse for the world, if it did not dissolve the whole fabric. But there is no fear of that; for it is as impossible that any thing should fall out otherwise than God would have it, as it is impossible for him to do otherwise than well, who being goodness itself, whatsoever he doth, cannot but be well done, yea the best that it was possible for it to be: and although we cannot dive into the secrets of Providence, nor understand the reasons of all the changes and chances which happen in

the world ; yet we must conclude in general, that there is great and good reason for all, and every one of them, in that they come from him, whose works are all like himself, infinitely wise and good, who never did, nor can do a vain or ill thing ; and therefore must be acknowledged to reign over the world both wisely and well : every thing that he doth being so wisely done, that nothing can be wiser ; every thing so well, that nothing can be better.

Hence also it necessarily follows, that his reign is most perfectly just and righteous. It is true, he hath mercy only on those on whom he will have mercy, but he is just to all indifferently ; never punishing any one more, nor rewarding any one less than he really deserves, but rather distributing his punishments so equally, that none hath cause to complain ; and his rewards so bountifully, that every one hath cause to thank him, and to say with David, *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*, Psal. cxlv. 17 which holds good in all cases, without any exception whatsoever : for, as Abraham said to him, *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?* Gen. xviii. 25. Yes surely, he always doth that which is most strictly just and right, otherwise he would act contrary to his own will and nature, which is the rule and standard of all justice and equity : so that he never did nor can do an unjust act. And therefore whatsoever happens to any particular nation or person in the world, how hard soever or severe it may seem to our corrupt imaginations, yet we must conclude it to be highly just and equitable : as in the case of Job, of whom God himself gave this testimony, that *he was a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God, and eschewed evil* : and yet nevertheless he suffered him to be deprived of all the comforts of this life in one day. And what did Job do ? did he censure God for it ? No ; but it is particularly observed of him, that *in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly*, Job i. 22. whereby is intimated

to us, that it is a very foolish thing indeed, for any one to charge God with injustice for any thing he doth : and so certainly it is, it being as impossible for God to be unjust, as it is for him not to be. And therefore he being so infinitely, so essentially just himself, the great kingdom over which he reigneth must needs be governed according to the strictest rules of justice in every punctilio and circumstance relating to it.

But if so, what must we do, and the rest of mankind, who have all rebelled against this the universal Monarch of the world, and so have justly deserved the severest of his judgments to be inflicted upon us ? How can we escape the hand of his justice, or avoid the punishments that are due unto us ? Blessed be his name, he himself hath found out a way for it : for being equally wise and just, and merciful too, he by his infinite wisdom hath so contrived it, as to execute his justice upon our sins, and yet at the same time shew mercy to our persons, or, as the Psalmist words it, *forgive us, although he take vengeance of our inventions*, Psal. xcix. 8. This is the great mystery revealed in the Gospel of Christ, which is as a court of equity, erected in this great kingdom, on purpose to mitigate the rigour of the common law, by transferring the punishments our sins have deserved upon another, and his merits upon us for the pardon of them ; by which means his justice may have its free course, and yet his mercy also be extended towards us.

For this almighty and all-glorious Monarch of the world, having only one Son, begotten of his own essence from all eternity, and so of the same divine nature or substance with himself, he was pleased to send him into this lower world, to take the nature of man upon him, and in it to suffer all the punishments that were due to the sins of mankind, even of all that partake of that nature which he assumed, and in which he suffered ; who is therefore said to have *tasted death for every man*, Heb. ii. 9. But he who thus suffered, being both God

and man in one person, although he suffered only in his human nature, yet that nature being at the same time united to his divine Person, his said sufferings were really more, and of greater value, than the sufferings of all mankind could have been, although every man had undergone the punishment due to his sins, to all eternity. For all their sufferings, how many, how great, how long soever they were, could have been no more than the sufferings of finite creatures ; whereas those which he underwent, were the sufferings of a person that is infinite, and therefore could not but be as much as the justice of God could require for the sins of all mankind. And therefore he is said to be a *propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world*, 1 John ii. 2. that is, he, by the one oblation of himself once offered, hath made it so full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of all mankind, that God may now be justly propitious to them, or so merciful as to pardon their sins, and receive them into his favour again, without any violation of his justice : for that being now fully satisfied by Christ's suffering in our nature, it cannot be violated by remitting the punishments which were due to our persons. But God may justly acquit and discharge us from all our sins, and advance us to the same degree of honour and happiness, as he would have done, if we had never offended him. And hence it is, that his government is so mild and gentle, so gracious and merciful, even to his rebellious subjects upon earth, which otherwise must all have died, as they are born in sin, and so have been miserable for ever ; whereas now there are none of them, but who, by the means of what Christ hath done and suffered for them, may find so much mercy at the hands of God, as to be absolved from all their sins, and restored to the love and favour of God, and in him enjoy a perpetual rest and felicity, the highest their nature is capable of. Neither doth he require any great matter of us in order to it, no more

than what we may easily do : for all that he requires of us is only *to repent, and believe the Gospel* ; that is, to do what we can ourselves to leave off our former sins, and to put our whole trust and confidence in this our almighty Saviour, for grace to lead a new life, for God's acceptance of our sincere though imperfect endeavours to serve him, for the pardon of all that we have done amiss, for God's receiving us into his favour here, and into the kingdom of heaven hereafter : all which, if we truly believe in Christ, he will most faithfully perform to us, according to the promises he hath made us to that purpose : insomuch, that upon the account of his merits, and constant intercession for us, God is always ready to be propitious and merciful to us, and as kind and gracious as if he had never been offended with us. And indeed, as no mercy would ever have been shewn to any man without Christ, so by him there is no mercy whatsoever, but any man upon the terms before said may have it ; Almighty God, for his sake, being so far reconciled to mankind, that all men receive some mercies at his hands, and some all they can desire. So that the government which he exerciseth over this lower part of his kingdom, even upon earth, is altogether as merciful as it is just and righteous.

Having thus considered the extent of that kingdom over which the Lord reigneth, by what laws and after what manner he reigneth over it ; it will be easy to shew, what I promised in the last place, how the latter part of my text follows upon the former, even, that seeing *the Lord reigneth*, therefore the *earth* may well *rejoice, and the multitudes of the isles be glad thereof* ; or that it is matter of great joy to all the inhabitants of this lower world, that the Lord reigneth. For here, by the *earth, and the multitude of the isles*, we are to understand all mankind living here below, whether upon the continent or main land, here called the earth, or in any of the many islands that are in the seas ; whereso-

ever they live, whatsoever kindred or family they are of, whatsoever state or condition they are in, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, rich or poor, male or female, they have all cause to *rejoice and be glad that the Lord reigneth*. It is true, at that time the Jews were his peculiar people, and therefore he reigned over them in a peculiar manner. But the royal prophet in this place takes no notice of that, but speaks only of that universal authority which he exerciseth over the whole world, wherein all mankind are equally concerned, as being all equally made and maintained by him, and also redeemed by the blood of his only-begotten Son, in *whom*, as the apostle speaks, *all are one*, Gal. iii. 21 and so are equally interested in the mercifulness, as well as in the justice of his government. And indeed, the Psalmist here seems to have a particular respect to this, as without which, the inhabitants of the earth would have no more cause to rejoice that *the Lord reigneth*, than the devils in hell have, who can never hope for any mercy at his hands; forasmuch as Christ took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. And that seems to be the reason that the Psalmist mentions only the *earth*, and the *isles* belonging to it; not those regions of darkness which we call hell, the inhabitants whereof have no cause to rejoice, but rather to be troubled, as they doubtless are, that *the Lord reigneth*, by reason of that justice and severity he continually executeth upon them, for their rebellions against him. But as for mankind, who inhabit the *earth*, and the *isles* about it, it must be matter of unspeakable joy to them, that he reigns, who *so loved them, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever of them believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life*, John iii. 16. For, as the apostle rightly argues, *he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* Rom. viii. 32. And seeing he, who is thus infinitely kind and

merciful to mankind, reigns over all the whole world, well might the Psalmist say, *Let the earth rejoice ; let the multitudes of the isles be glad thereof.*

And certainly, nothing in the world can raise up our souls to so high a pitch of joy and comfort, as a firm belief and due consideration of this great truth, that *the Lord reigneth* : as we may easily perceive, if we do but consider, that our souls being of a pure and spiritual nature, they are apt of themselves to be cheerful and pleasant, singing, and praising, and rejoicing in him that made them ; and would always be so, if they were not hindered and diverted by false ideas and representations of external objects, which the serious consideration of this great truth would either remove or rectify. There are two things especially, that deprive the soul of true joy and comfort, and make it often sad and disconsolate ; and they are, the apprehension of some future danger, and the sense of some present trouble ; both which will be corrected or dispersed by this one consideration duly weighed.

First therefore, we are apt to be affrighted and cast down at the apprehension of some imminent danger, or some great affliction or calamity that we think ready to fall upon us. If we apprehend any potent and malicious enemies upon earth, striving all they can to undermine and ruin us, this puts us into such frights and fears, that we can take no comfort in our very friends, but are apt to say with David, *I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul*, 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. If we apprehend any great revolutions in the church or state we live in, that are likely to turn all things upside down, this puts us also into such confusion and disorder, as leaves no room for joy or satisfaction in our now private enjoyments. If we apprehend any great loss in our estates, or any likelihood that we may be reduced to want and penury, this suppresseth our spirits, so that we can take no pleasure in what we still possess, nor in the hopes we have that it will be continued to us. If we apprehend

the powers of hell let loose upon us, and Satan standing at our right hand, ready to devour us, this disquiets and disturbs our minds, so that all things seem black and melancholy about us. If we apprehend any dangerous distemper seizing upon us, and threatening to carry us into the other world, this deprives us of all manner of comfort, and makes us spend the residue of our days in grief and sadness, yea, in horror and confusion of mind.

But now a constant belief and persuasion that *the Lord reigneth*, will rectify these, and such like false apprehensions of things, and so prevent our being troubled or disquieted about them. For what if we have never so many, and so powerful enemies? What if they conspire together to take away your good name, your estates, your liberty, or your life itself; remember, *the Lord reigneth; and if he be for you, who can be against you?* If he protect you, what harm can fall upon you? He hath the hearts of all your enemies in his hand, and their designs always under his eye, and can wind and turn them as he sees good. He can abate their pride, assuage their malice, and confound their devices against you. He can prevent the mischief they hatch against you, or alter the nature of it, so as to make it really good and profitable for you. He can tie up their hands that they cannot act, their tongues that they cannot speak, yea, their very hearts, that they cannot so much as imagine any evil against you. For he reigns over the whole world, and therefore over them, so that they can neither act, nor speak, nor think, nor will, nor love, nor hate, nor stir one jot without him. This is that which made David rejoice and triumph in the midst of all his enemies: *The Lord, saith he, is my light, and my salvation, whom then should I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came about me, to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in*

this will I be confident, Psal. xxvii. 1, 2, 3. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ; though the waters thereof roar and are troubled ; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, Psal. xlv. 1, 2, 3. In God will I praise his word ; in the Lord will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid what man can do unto me, Psal. lvi. 10, 11. As if he had said, in short, The Lord reigneth ; therefore I will not fear any mortal men, but rejoice and be glad in him continually.

And what if storms and tempests should be even raised against the church, as they lately were, threatening its ruin and destruction ? What need we fear, seeing *he reigneth*, who hath built it upon a rock, and promised that *the gates of hell should not prevail against it* ? What then if *the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing* ? *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision, Psal. ii. 1, 4.* And what if a dark cloud, full of vengeance and fury, hang over the nation or city where we dwell ? And what if it should seem ready every moment to empty itself upon us ? What need we regard that, when *the Lord reigneth, who holdeth all the clouds in a balance, and can disperse them with the breath of his nostrils*, or send them where he pleaseth ? *Who stilleth the raging of the sea, and the noise of his waves, and the madness of the people, Psal. lxxv. 7.* Who can bring light out of darkness, good out of evil, order out of confusion, and hath promised to do so for his own people.

But some perhaps may not be concerned so much for the public, as for their own private affairs, being apprehensive of a great decay in their trade, disappointments in their hopes, and losses in their estates, whereby they may be brought into extreme poverty. But why should

any one fear that ? *The Lord reigneth, who giveth fodder to the cattle, and feedeth the young ravens that call upon him, Psal. cxlvii. 9. Behold then the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them : and are not ye much better than they ? Matt. vi. 26. Behold, what care he takes of the whole creation ! How every thing subsists in him, and by him ! How constantly he measures out to every one such a proportion of temporal blessings, as he knows to be best for them ! Why then should you fear, lest you should be exempted from that general provision he makes for all his creatures ? Why rather do ye not rejoice that the Lord reigneth, and say, and sing continually with the prophet, Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall ; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation, Hab. iii. 17, 18.*

But there are others to whom all these temporal troubles seem, as they are, even as nothing, in comparison of the great danger their souls are in, especially from that subtle, inveterate, and implacable enemy of mankind, the devil, *who goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, 1 Pet. v. 8.*

And it cannot be denied, but that his cunning is as great as his power, and his malice as either, so that he takes, or makes occasion continually to ensnare and destroy men. But what then ? It is not he, but the Lord that reigneth, and that reigneth over him, as well as over any of his other creatures : yea, and keeps him perpetually in chains and fetters, and that he cannot move a foot or hand, until he hath first obtained leave of the Lord of hosts ; as we see not only in Job, but also in that remarkable history in the Gospel, where a whole legion of devils were forced to come out of a man at Christ's command, and could not so much as enter into

swine till he had given them leave to do it, Mark v. 13. What then, if all the devils in hell should set themselves against one man, and employ all their agents upon earth, as witches, and wizards, and such like wretched creatures, to destroy or hurt him? They may as well undertake to dissolve the whole creation, as do him the least mischief imaginable, without God's permission: as Balaam found by experience, and therefore said; *Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel*, Numb. xxiii. 23. No, if a man live in the true faith and fear of God, the devil may grin at him, and shew his teeth, but can do him no more hurt than a dog doth to the moon, when he barks at it: for such a one lives on high, far above the devil's reach, under the immediate protection of him that reigneth over the whole world, and keeps all the powers of hell in as much subjection, as the weakest insects upon earth.

And what if we should, as ere long we shall, be seized by some mortal distemper, that by degrees will dissolve *these earthly tabernacles* we now live in, and make them unfit for our souls to inhabit any longer? *The Lord reigneth*, he always reigneth, he never dies nor decays, but is continually the same, is health in sickness, strength in weakness, life in death itself. Which therefore will be so far from doing us any hurt, that it will but bring us nearer to our chiefest good, and possess us with a clearer vision, and more perfect fruition of his eternal Godhead, who is the only joy, and crown, and glory, and happiness, and life of our immortal souls. And then we shall fully experience what cause we have to rejoice and be glad that the Lord reigneth.

That the Lord reigneth! Methinks the very repeating of these words is sufficient not only to support our spirits against the fear of all future danger, but also to rejoice and delight our hearts in the midst of trouble: for seeing he reigneth, whatsoever our trouble be, we may be confident that he is in it, to bless and sanctify it

to us, to comfort us under it, to make us better by it, and in his good time to ease us of it. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. And he never chasteneth us for his own pleasure, but only for our own profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness,* Heb. xii. 6. And what a mighty comfort is this in all our troubles, that they come from the love of God, and are designed by him to make us like unto himself, holy as he is holy? whereby our very troubles afford us real matter of comfort, the highest we can ever have, comfort in God himself. And we may always say with David, *In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul,* Psal. xciv. 19. *This is my comfort in mine affliction, for thy word hath quickened me. I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself,* Psal. cxix. 50, 52.

Thus, when Shimei cursed king David, the king was so far from being discomposed and disturbed at it, that he comforted himself with this, *that it was the Lord's doing, and that he would turn it to good. Let him alone,* saith he, *let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be, that the Lord will look upon mine affliction, and the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day,* 2 Sam. xvi. 12. Thus when Job was deprived of all his children and his whole estate in one day, he comforted himself with this, that it was the Lord that did it: *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord,* Job i. 21. Thus also, when old Eli heard that his house and family should be destroyed, he said, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good,* 1 Sam. iii. 18. implying, that what God doth, must needs be good, and therefore he could not but submit to it, and be thankful for it; as that which God himself knew to be really good, and would make it so to him. Thus, whatsoever happens, we have still cause to *rejoice and be glad that the Lord reigneth*, that it is he that doth it, and therefore it cannot

but be well done. And with this we may, and ought to comfort ourselves in all the occurrences of this mortal life, how grievous soever, at first sight, they may seem unto us.

As for example : are we brought into such straits and difficulties, that we know not which way to take, nor what to do, whereby to extricate ourselves ? *The Lord reigneth*, he brought us into them, he will do us good by them, and then he will bring us out of them again. Do we want the necessities or conveniences of this present life, as meat, drink, and clothing, for ourselves and families ? *The Lord reigneth*, he knows it is not convenient for us at present to have conveniences, but rather necessary for us to want those things which are necessary for other people : and when they become so to us, he will supply us with them ; for *the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*, Psal. xxiv. 1. Are we cursed, reproached, and slandered by our neighbours ? *The Lord reigneth*, he bade them, or at least permitted them to do it, to exercise our patience, and make us humble ; and when they have had their due effect upon us, he will turn their cursings into blessings, their reproaches to our honour, and all their slanders into matter of joy and triumph. Are we hated and contemned by all about us ? *The Lord reigneth*, and therefore would not suffer it, but that their hatred is better for us than their love would be, and their contempt will do us more good than ever their honour or high esteem could do. Have we lost the best friends or the dearest relations we had in this world ? *The Lord reigneth*, the best, the greatest, the surest friend we ever had, or can have, in all the world ; and we can never lose him, for *he will never leave or forsake us*. Do we languish under some chronical distemper, that fills our bodies with aches and pains, or makes them consume, or pine away ? *The Lord reigneth*, he sent these distempers into our bodies, to cure the distempers of our souls ; he fills us with pain, to keep us

from sin, and causes our flesh to decay, that the sense of our weakness may add *strength to our faith, and seriousness to our repentance*. Are we afflicted with some acute disease, that will certainly part our souls and bodies in sunder? *The Lord reigneth*, and will then take us to reign with him, and to enjoy him for ever. Are we still troubled with the relics of sin within us, and ready every moment to be overcome by them? *The Lord reigneth*, and will not suffer sin to reign any longer in our mortal bodies, that we *should obey it in the lusts thereof*, Rom. vi. 12. Thus nothing can happen to the trouble and disturbance of our minds, but this is still our comfort, that *the Lord reigneth*; so that we may always say with David, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I will yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God*, Psal. xlii. 11. The Lord, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; *God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost* reigneth; infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness, and justice, and love, and mercy, reigneth; *Jehovah* reigneth, he reigneth over all, and every thing in the whole world: *let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof*.

But some perhaps may say, It is true indeed, this is certainly a great cause of joy to all people, and to us as well as to any other; and we should be very happy, if we could always rejoice at it; but we find by experience, that our own minds are often so dejected and cast down, that nothing will raise them up again, no, not the consideration of God's general and special providence over the world, and over us particularly. What therefore must we do, to bring our minds into such a frame, that we may always rejoice in the Lord, and be glad that he reigneth?

To this I answer, that in order thereunto, it is first necessary, that you avoid whatsoever you know to be offensive to this the almighty Governor of the world,

or contrary to his revealed will : otherwise, instead of rejoicing that he reigneth, you will be troubled at it, being conscious to yourselves that you lie under his displeasure, and may justly expect to feel the sad effects of it every moment. Neither is it enough that you avoid the outward acts of sin, but you must get your hearts purged from all corrupt and sinful affections, and made, in some measure, *holy and pure, as he is* : otherwise you will not be capable of discerning that infinite wisdom, and goodness, which he exerciseth in the government of the world, and so can take no comfort in it : for none but *the pure in heart can see God*, Matt. v. 8. all others living in the dark, as without God in the world, having no due sense of him or his government upon their hearts ; and then it is no wonder that they are not affected with it, nor delighted in it : wherefore, if you desire to take pleasure, as you ought, in the dispensations of divine Providence, you must *cleanse yourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*, 2 Cor. vii. 1. And then being rightly disposed for it, God himself will manifest himself unto you, as his only-begotten Son hath assured us, saying, *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me ; and he that loveth me, shall be beloved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him*, John xiv. 21. And when God is once pleased to unveil and manifest himself unto you, then you will soon behold the beauty and glory that shines forth in all his works, and be highly ravished and delighted with it.

But for that end, you must look upon this almighty Being not only as reigning over the world in general, but as one in whom yourselves have a particular interest, through the merits and intercession of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, stedfastly believing and trusting on him to reconcile this infinite and all-glorious Monarch to you, that he may be your God, your Guide, your Governor, your Father, and so that whatsoever he doth, is

really for your good and advantage ; which will not only afford you constant matter of rejoicing, but will make you actually to rejoice and be glad that he reigneth, to whom you yourselves are so nearly related, and with whom you have so sure a friend as his only-begotten Son, who loved you, and gave himself for you.

But in order to the purifying our hearts by such a faith, whereby we may be duly qualified and disposed to *rejoice* continually, and to *be glad* that *the Lord reigneth*, we must be sure to converse as much as possibly we can with him, in the use of those means which he hath appointed, whereby to make known himself to us, and to incline our hearts to him. We must take all opportunities of praying to him, and of praising his holy name, and of reading and hearing his most holy word, and of receiving the mystical body and blood of his beloved Son : by which means, duly, sincerely, and constantly performed, our souls by degrees will be possessed, and filled with a due sense of his divine wisdom and goodness, and the rest of those infinite perfections which he displayeth in the government of the world, and in the ordering and disposal of all and every thing that is in it : and then we shall behold, admire, and rejoice in every thing that he doth, and in him that doth it. Which therefore we must strive to do, not only now and then, but continually, so as to have him and his wondrous works, always in our thoughts ; still thinking with ourselves, when any thing happens to us, or to any other, *this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.* *The Lord reigneth*, it is he that hath done this, and therefore I am sure it is wisely and well done. It is my Lord, it is my God and Father that hath brought this to pass, *I will rejoice and be glad in him, I will praise and magnify his name for it* By thus accustoming ourselves to call God to mind upon all occasions, and to look upon him as the first cause of all things, we shall soon learn the divine art of taking comfort in every thing that happens in the world, one

as well as another, so as never to be thoughtful or solicitous about what may, nor troubled for what doth, fall out ; but in the midst of all the changes and vicissitudes of this mortal life, still to say and sing, not only with our mouths, but from the very bottom of our hearts, *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice ; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.*

S E R M O N C V .

GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE THE BEST GUARD AGAINST SIN.

PSALM xvi. 8.

*I have set the Lord always before me : because he is
at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

AS we are all conceived and born, so naturally we all live, in sin ; our whole lives being nothing else, in a manner, but one continued sin against him, in whom we live ; against Almighty God, who made us ; and who made us on purpose that we might glorify, serve, and worship him, by observing those wise and good laws, which he for that purpose hath prescribed to us : whereas we cannot but be conscious to ourselves, that we have either totally neglected, or else transgressed, or at least come so far short of all his said laws, that we have not punctually observed any one of them, since we came into the world, to this day ; but have rather *followed the devices and desires of our own sinful hearts*, and have been hurried about by our corrupt humours and passions, which carry us headlong, directly contrary to the rules which God hath set us ; so that we are always either *doing what we ought not* to do, or *not doing what we ought*, or at least, not so as we ought to do it ; and so no way answer the end of our creation, but live to no purpose in the world, or rather to a very ill one : for instead of serving and glorifying our great Creator,

we live in open rebellion against him, and do what we can to reproach and dishonour his sacred name ; which is so offensive and displeasing to his divine Majesty, that it is no wonder that he so orders it in his providence, that we meet with many troubles and crosses in the world. It is rather a wonder that we meet with no more : for if he should punish us according as our sins deserve, he might justly strip us of all the mercies we enjoy, and inflict all manner of judgments upon us : he may justly divest us of our estates, and reduce us to the extremity of want and poverty : he may justly deprive us of our health, and cause us to lie languishing upon a sick-bed all our days : he may justly take all our friends and relations from us, or make them enemies and scourges to us : he may justly blast our credit and reputation in the world, and make us the scorn and derision of all that are about us : yea, he may justly condemn us immediately to everlasting shame and torment, and not suffer us to breathe any longer in his air, or tread any longer upon his earth, but command us to go out of this place into the infernal pit, *where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*. If he should lay any or all of these punishments upon us, we must still acknowledge him to be *just in all his ways, and righteous in all his judgments* : for we have sinned against him, and therefore lie perfectly at his mercy : he may do with us what he pleases, and if he should execute the severity of his wrath upon us, it is no more than what our iniquities have deserved from him.

Now this being our present state and condition by nature, it cannot surely but be worth the while to bethink ourselves what to do in it, and to consider, whether there may not be some way found out, whereby we may, at least in some measure, keep ourselves from those sins, which we have hitherto been so apt to fall into, and so prevent those many and great judgments, which God hath threatened, and may justly, every moment, inflict upon us for them. That the thing is pos-

sible to be done, we know, because others have done it before us : and that we are as capable of doing it as they were, we know likewise, because we have the same power and means to do it as they had. The only question is, what course they took for the effecting of it ; and, by consequence, what course we must take, if we desire to do it effectually. For this therefore, our best way will be to consult such, of whom we are fully assured, that they really did it : amongst whom we cannot but acknowledge David to have been one of the most eminent, as being able to say by the Spirit of truth, itself bearing witness with him, *I was also upright before God, and I kept myself from mine iniquity*, Psal. xviii. 23. and who therefore elsewhere saith, *I will not be afraid of ten thousand of the people, that have set themselves against me round about*, Psal. iii. 6. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*, Psal. xxiii. 4. But how did David thus keep himself from sin, yea, from his own, his beloved sin, so as to fear no evil that could befall him for it ? What course did he take ? What method did he use for the doing of it ? To understand that, we need go no farther than my text, wherein he plainly acquaints us with it, saying, *I have set the Lord always before me : because he is on my right hand, I shall not be moved*. As if he had said, although by nature I am very apt to be moved from my duty into sin, and so into all the troubles which attend it, yet I keep myself from it, by setting the Lord always before me ; for so long as he is at my right hand, I am sure not to be moved, so as to fall either into sin, or any real misery.

This therefore being the great means that David used, and found so effectual in this case, I shall endeavour to explain it more particularly to you ; and for that purpose shall consider,

I. What it is properly to set the Lord always before us.

II. How much this conduceth to our continuing sted-

fast, both in our duty to God, and in his love and favour towards us, so as not to be moved either to do or suffer any real evil in the world.

I. In speaking to the first, I suppose I need not tell you, whom we are here to understand by the Lord; even the Lord of hosts, the most mighty and eternal God, who made all things by the power of his word; who upholdeth all things by the word of his power, and ordereth all things in the world, according to the pleasure of his own will; who is not only infinitely wise, and powerful, and great, and just, and merciful, and good, and glorious in all perfections; but infinite wisdom, and power, and greatness, and justice, and mercy, and goodness, and glory, and perfection itself: such infinite wisdom, that in every thing he doth, he proposeth the best ends, chooseth the best means, and useth them in the best manner that can be: such infinite power, that he can do what he will, by willing it to be done: such infinite greatness, that he comprehendeth all things, and is comprehended of nothing: such infinite justice, that he punishes every sin that is committed: such infinite mercy, that he pardoneth every sinner that repenteth: such infinite goodness, that every thing he is, or doth, or makes, is good; yea, the best that it is possible for it to be: so that his goodness is over all his works: such infinite glory, that he displays himself, and shines forth in, upon, through, and beyond all the creatures in heaven and earth: such infinite perfection, that as he hath infinite perfections in him, so every perfection in him is infinite: and therefore, when we speak of the Lord, we are not to apprehend him as like to any thing we know, but as one infinitely greater, and higher, and better, and holier than any thing that we are able to comprehend; in comparison of whom, nothing else is great, or high, or good, or holy, or any thing at all.

This is the Lord, that Almighty God, whom David did, and we ought always to set before us: not as if he were not before us unless we set him there, nor yet as

if we could set him before us more than he really is ; but we are said to set the Lord before us, when we actually believe, and are fully persuaded, that he is with us, and sees us, as he really is, and doth continually ; when we exercise that faith, which, as the apostle saith, *is the evidence of things not seen*, and so possesseth us with as firm a confidence, and as great a certainty, that God is present with us, as that any thing we see is so, although we cannot perceive him by any of our senses : as Job observed of him, saying, *Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not ; he passeth on also, and I perceive him not*, Job ix. 11. And the reason is, because our senses cannot perceive any thing but their own respective objects, which are all matter diversly put together, modified, and agitated so, as that each of them may move and affect its proper sense, or that part of our bodies which is fitted for it, by being so composed and ordered, that it is apt to be affected with such particular impressions as are made upon it, and no other. And hence it is, that no sensible object can be perceived by any other than its own proper sense ; we can no more see a sound, or hear a colour, than as if there was no such thing in nature.

But now God being a most simple and pure Spirit, and so having no body, nor matter in him, he is not a proper object for any of our bodily senses, and therefore can be no more perceived by them, than as if there were no such Being in the world. But is there no way then whereby it is possible to perceive him ? Yes surely ; we may and ought to perceive him by that spiritual sense, as I may call it, which he hath implanted in us, suitable to his own nature, even by a firm and stedfast belief in him, whereby we are as fully persuaded that he is, as that we are ; and that he is wheresoever we are, as that we ourselves are there : for this we are fully assured of from his own mouth, saying, *Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool*, Isa. lxvi. 1 and, *Can any one hide himself in secret places, that I shall not*

see him ? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth ? saith the Lord, Jer. xxiii. 24. and by his holy Spirit, speaking in David, and saying unto him, Thou hast set me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy presence ? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there ; or if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me, Psal. cxxxix. 6, 10. Neither are we assured of this only by his word, but likewise by his works ; for all things were made, and all things are continually preserved and governed by him, and therefore nothing be sure can be remote or distant from him : it is in him we live, and move, and have our being ; and therefore it is impossible that we should either live, or move, or be any where but where he is : for, to suppose ourselves to be where God is not, is to suppose ourselves to be, and not to be at the same time ; for our very being is in him, and depends altogether upon his presence with us, and so giving existence to us ; insomuch that should he withdraw his presence from us but one moment, we should in that moment drop down to nothing, and so cease to be : and therefore nothing can be more present to us than God is, nor indeed so much ; he being not only always with us, but in us, and we in him.

And seeing God is always thus present with us, and in us, we are thereby assured likewise that he being all wisdom and knowledge, must needs be intimately acquainted with every thing we do, with every thing we speak, and with every thing we think, or will, or nill, or desire, or abhor ; even with all the several affections and inclinations of our souls, as well as with the several actions, gestures, or motions of our bodies : as David saith, *The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are but vanity, Psal. xciv. 11. He saw, before the flood, that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth,*

and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, Gen. vi. 5. which he could not have done, had he not seen every thought of every man's heart in the whole world, which he doth more plainly than any man knows what he himself thinks ; which therefore every man ought to be constantly assured of, as David was, when he said to God, O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me : thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising ; thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying-down, and art acquainted with all my ways ; for there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether, Psal. cxxxix. 1, 4.

And as there is no man, nor any thing in man, so neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight : for *all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do ;* as we read Heb. iv. 13. All creatures have to do with God, and he with them : and whether they know him or no, be sure he always knows them, and takes particular notice not only of all things in general, but of every thing particularly ; as he did at the beginning of the world, when it is said, that *God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good, Gen. i. 31.* So he doth to this day : he continually looks upon every thing that is, what it is, and where it is, and whether it be good or evil : he every moment sees every angel and glorified saint in heaven ; every devil and damned soul in hell ; every fowl in the air ; every fish in the sea ; every animal, and whatsoever else is upon or within the earth, from the highest to the lowest, from the greatest to the least thing that is, Matt. x. 30. And among other things he sees every one of us particularly, and knows every thing that every one of us ever thought, or spoke, or did, since we were born, to this moment ; and at this moment he looks into every one of our hearts, and sees what we are thinking, and how we are affected with what

we hear concerning him : and so he doth, as to every man, woman, and child, that ever was, or at this day is upon the face of the earth. How well then may we here cry out with David, *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me ; it is high, I cannot attain unto it*, Psal. cxxxix. 6. And with St. Paul, *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !* Rom. xi. 33.

From hence therefore it appears, what ground we have to believe that God is always certainly present with us, so as perfectly to know every action and circumstance of our whole lives : and so long as we actually think upon and really believe this, so long we may be truly said to *set the Lord before us* ; and such a persuasion as this will have the same force and power upon us, as if we saw him with our eyes. But that it may have its whole effect, towards the keeping of us from being moved, we are farther to observe, that by *Jehovah, the Lord*, we are here to understand, as the divine nature in general, so each divine Person subsisting in it, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, they being all equally one and the same *Jehovah, the Lord*. And therefore in order to our setting the Lord before us as we ought, we must believe that all and every one of these divine Persons is always present with us.

First, We are to believe that God the Father is always present with us as such, even as he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our God and Father, as Christ himself hath assured us, saying, *I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God*, John xx. 17. and therefore commands us, wheresoever we are, to address ourselves to him as our Father, saying, *Our Father which art in heaven*, &c. Matt. vi. 9. And soon after tells us, that our *heavenly Father seeth in secret, and knows what things we have need of*, ver. 18, 32. Whereby he plainly signifies his pleasure, that he would have us set

God before us, under that consideration and relation to us, as he is our Father ; which will contribute much towards our not being moved at any thing that shall happen to us.

And as we are to believe God the Father, so likewise God the Son, to be always with us, even the eternal Son of God, who was pleased to become the Son of man too, by assuming our human nature into his divine Person, so as to be both God and man in one and the same person : by which means, although the human nature which he assumed never was or can be in any more than one place at once, yet the same divine Person, to which that nature is united, always was, and is, and ever will be, in all places, and know all things in heaven and earth. And therefore we read, that when he was in his mortal body upon earth, he was at the same time in heaven, John iii. 13. and every where, Matt. xviii. 20. He knew the very thoughts of the Scribes and Pharisees, Matt. ix. 4. and xii. 25. He saw Nathanael under the fig-tree, and knew his heart so well, as to say, he was an *Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile*, John i. 47. He knew that the woman of Samaria that talked with him had had *five husbands*, although she herself said she *had never a one*, John iv. 17, 18. He knew that Lazarus was dead, before any body had told him so, John xi. 14. He knew which of his disciples intended to betray him, for all that he endeavoured to keep it from him as much as he could, John xiii. 11. Yea St. Peter appealed to his omniscience, whether he did not love him, saying to our Saviour, *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*, John xxi. 17. and ii. 24. And as Christ was thus in all places, and knew all things, whilst his human nature was still upon earth ; so when he was to ascend in that to heaven, he promised notwithstanding, that he himself would still continue with his church upon earth, saying to his disciples, *Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world*, Matt. xxviii. 20.

Hence therefore, although the manhood of Christ be now at the right hand of God in heaven, and will not come down from thence till the end of the world, yet he himself, in his divine Person, to whom that manhood in which he suffered for us is united, is always present with us : so that whatsoever other company we are in, he still makes one ; or, if we have no other, be sure we have his company wheresoever we are ; and therefore can never be alone : for he that is at God's right hand in his human nature, in his divine is always at ours too, ready to aid and assist us upon all occasions, if we do but make our applications to him, as we well may to one that is never out of sight or hearing. And this I look upon as our great preservative and security from evil and danger, that he who so loved us, as to give himself for us, never leaves us, nor forsakes us, but always keeps close to us, and nearer than any danger or evil can be. For by this means we are always sure of a true and almighty Friend at hand, who *in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted*, Heb. ii. 18. who was once subject to all the infirmities of our nature, but without sin ; he was hungry, and thirsty, and weary, and sleepy ; he felt pain and sorrow, and at last the very pangs of death itself ; and therefore cannot but be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and know how to give suitable relief to all and every one of them ; who also is still in our nature, and therefore cannot but have a great love and kindness for it, and for all that partake of it ; yea, who is always interceding for us in heaven, and always present with us upon earth too ; and therefore we cannot doubt but he will do all he can for us. And what can he not do for us that he will ? And what can he not enable us also to do, when St. Paul could say upon his own experience, *I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me* ? Phil. iv. 13. Which plainly shews, that Christ was always so present with him, as to supply him continually with grace and power to do good,

all the good that was required of him. And we certainly may have the same experience as he had, if we do but do as he did, even set Christ always before us, by believing that he is always present and ready to assist us ; which, as I have now shewn, we have all the reason in the world to believe, and therefore must act against reason grounded upon God's word, unless we do it.

The same may be said likewise concerning the third person in the most sacred Trinity, even the Holy Ghost, who, proceeding from the Father and the Son, and being of the same nature and substance with them, must needs be where they are ; that is, wheresoever any thing in the world is : but as to all those who believe in Christ, he is in a peculiar manner with them, according to Christ's own promise, saying unto them, *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth*, John xiv. 16. From whence it appears, that the Spirit of God, even as such, doth not only come to us now and then, but makes his constant abode with us ; yea, he dwells in us, so as to consecrate our very bodies into temples, places of God's special residence, as the apostle informs the believing Corinthians, saying, *What ! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you ?* 1 Cor. vi. 19. And elsewhere, *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ?* chap. iii. 16. And if the Spirit of God inhabits, or dwells in us, be sure he is always ready to enlighten our minds, to inform our judgments, to direct our thoughts, to awaken our consciences, to regulate our passions, to purify and comfort our hearts, and to sanctify us wholly in soul, body, and spirit. And we may well set him before us, who is always thus by us, and in us : as David did, when he said to God, *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit ?* Psal. cxxxix. 7 whereby he himself hath taught us how he did, and we ought to set God alway before us ; even by being fully assured, that he and his holy Spirit is always

with us wheresoever we are; and that it is as impossible for us to be where he is not, as it is for him not to be.

From these things therefore duly considered, we may easily gather the full sense and meaning of these words, *I have set the Lord alway before me*; according to the exposition which St. Peter himself hath given of them, where he renders them, *I foresaw the Lord alway before my face*, Acts ii. 25. So that in order to our doing of it aright, it is necessary that we firmly believe, and be firmly persuaded in our minds, that the Lord, the almighty Creator and Governor of the world, is every where; and particularly in the place where we are, just by us, and with us, and in us: that he clearly sees every act we do, hears every word we speak, and knows every thought, passion, and motion of our minds: that he is perfectly acquainted with all our purposes and designs, with what we intend to do, whether we do it or not: that he takes particular notice of every particular action and circumstance of our whole lives: that God the Father is always present with us, to preserve, maintain, and provide for us: that God the Son is always with us, to defend, govern, assist, and strengthen us: that God the Holy Ghost is always present with us, to sanctify, direct, and comfort us. And all this we must believe, not only now and then, but, as it is here expressed, *always*; so as never to doubt of the truth of these things, nor suffer them to go out of our minds, but to be always acting our faith in God, as present with us, and to be always looking upon him as always looking upon us. And then we may be truly said to *set the Lord always before us*.

And if he be thus at our *right hand*, we shall *not be moved*; as David had found by experience, and therefore confidently asserts of himself, *I shall not be moved*: From what? *A fide ad infidelitatem, a bono ad malum; from faith to infidelity, from good to evil*, as St. Hierom expounds: and so certainly the words, being spoken indefinitely, ought to be understood in their full extent: I shall

not be moved upon any account, in any respect whatsoever, from no manner of good, nor into any manner of evil, but shall alway remain stedfast and unmoveable as a rock, established and supported by that almighty power that is always with me.

The same may be said of all that *always set the Lord before them* : they *shall never be moved*, so as to fall into and live in any gross sin ; they *shall never be moved*, so as to fail in any necessary duty unto God ; they shall *never be moved* from a good to an evil state and condition of life : and all because they *set God alway before them*, and so have him alway at *their right hand* : which is the other thing I promised to shew, and may easily do it.

For, first, he who *sets God alway before his eyes*, so as always to be thinking of him that is the only good, how can he so much as think of any thing that is evil ? For this would be to think at the same time of two things directly contrary, yea, contradictory to one another, which is impossible. But how then can he do any evil, and so act contrary both to him he thinks of, and to his own thoughts of him ? Alas ! the thoughts of God as always present with him fill his soul with such a sense of his greatness and glory, that he cannot but dread the thoughts of doing any thing offensive or displeasing to him ; and can never be moved to do it by any temptation whatsoever : for whensoever he is tempted to any sin, he still considers that God sees him, and saith within himself, as Joseph did, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ?* Gen. xxxix. 9. And therefore, whensoever you commit any sinful act, you may conclude that you did not think of God at that time, nor believe him to be present with you ; as David observed, saying, *The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes*, Psal. xxxvi. 1 That is, every sin that a man committeth, is a plain demonstration to me, that he doth not set God before

his eyes ; for if he did, he could not but fear him, so as not to dare to break his laws, and so incense his wrath and indignation against himself ; but would rather abhor himself that he ever hath offended God, and resolve to do so no more ; as we see in Job, *I have heard of thee, saith he, by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee : wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*, Job xlii. 5, 6. Where we may observe, what a mighty force the sight of God had upon him ; it struck him as it were down, he was not able to stand under it, but fell down into an utter abhorrence of himself before him ; and it was this that kept him from oppressing or injuring the poor, by withholding his alms from them ; as he himself saith, *If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering : if his loins have not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep : if I have lift up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate ; then let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone : for destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure*, Job xxxi. 19—23. He saw it seems the highness and majesty of God, which struck such a terror into him, that he could not endure himself, nor the thoughts of doing any thing that might offend him : and so it is doubtless with all who set God always before them ; his presence cannot but strike that awe into them, that they will not dare to break his laws, and so provoke and affront him to his face. As for example :

How can they blaspheme or profane the sacred name of God, who believe at the same time that he hears every word they speak against him, and will certainly one time or other be revenged upon them for it ? How can they be high and proud in their own conceit, who believe themselves to be in the presence of the most high God, who is not only infinitely above them, but hath told them, that he *resists the proud, and gives grace only to the humble* ? How can they indulge them-

selves in lust or luxury, in drunkenness or debauchery, who believe at the same time that God sees them, and will ere long call them to an account for it? How can they oppress the poor, or wrong their neighbour, by lying, stealing, cheating, or the like, who believe that the eye of God is upon them, and his hand ready to strike them for it? How can they play the hypocrite, and dissemble with God, or retain any revenge, malice, envy, or hatred against their neighbour, who believe that God sees their hearts, and knows how they stand affected, both towards himself, and towards all men? In a word, how can they allow themselves in any vice or wickedness whatsoever, who set God always before them, and believe that the Judge of the whole world takes particular notice of them all the while? A constant belief of this, would soon make them weary of their sins, and turn their inclinations to them into utter abhorrence and detestation of them.

As, suppose a company of traitors should meet together to consult how to carry on a rebellion against the king, and while they were at it, the king himself should always happen to come in among them; how confounded would they be at his presence? how soon would they leave off consulting any more about it? Every sin is an act of treason and rebellion against the supreme Monarch of the world, who is always privy to every step that is made towards it, and is constantly present both at the designing and acting of it: and if men did but see him as really as he is there, they would not dare so much as to think any more of it.

Hence therefore we may see one great reason wherefore virtue is so rare, and vice so common in the world; why there are so few pious, so many wicked persons in it, even because most men live as without God in the world, never thinking of him, at least not so as to believe him to be always with them. *The wicked, saith David, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts, Psal.*

x. 4. And elsewhere, speaking to God, he saith, *O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them*, Psal. lxxxvi. 14. That is the reason why they are so wicked, so proud, and violent, because they never think of God, nor set him before them: if they did that they would soon become more holy, more humble, and meek; the very thinking of him would of itself contribute very much towards it; much more when it is influenced and assisted by the Spirit of God, which usually moves upon our souls while we are thinking and acting our faith upon him, and so diverts our thoughts, and by consequence our affections, from every thing that is contrary to his holy nature, and inclines our hearts to keep his laws: and therefore all who constantly set God before them, can never be moved so as to fall quite from him, because they are still supported and assisted by him that is at their right hand; and though he may sometime see good to let go his hold of them, and suffer them to slip and stumble into sin, yet if they do not let go their hold of him too, but continue to act their faith on him, they will soon get up again, and walk more steadily than ever.

A remarkable instance of which we have in St. Peter, to whom our Lord said, *Simon, Simon, behold satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren*; Luke xxii. 31, 32. From whence it appears, that although a great temptation should befall him, which should shake him very much, and endanger his total ruin, yet that his faith should not fail, and by that he should recover himself, and grow stronger afterwards: and so it came to pass; for when he had denied his Master thrice, he turned his eyes towards him, and saw Christ turning himself, and looking upon him; upon which he immediately called to mind the words of our

Lord, how he said, *Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice: and he went out, and wept bitterly*, Luke xxii. 61, 62. and from that time forward could never be moved to deny his Master any more, but continued his faithful servant all his life long, and at last too laid it down for his sake. And as St. Peter, so soon as ever he saw Christ looking upon him, immediately called his sin to remembrance, and repented of it; so let any one also who is fallen into any grievous sin, but look up to God or Christ, and firmly believe that he sees him, and he will soon call his sin to mind, as St. Peter did, and be as much troubled for it, and as really converted from it, as he was.

And seeing this prevents our falling into, or lying long in sin, it must needs keep us likewise firm and stedfast in our duty to God: for the neglect of that being a sin, and a great one too, whatsoever conduceth towards the preserving us from sin, cannot but conduce also towards the performance of our duty; as setting of God always before us, doth in an eminent manner, in-somuch that we can neither perform any duty well without it, nor ill with it. He that setteth upon any duty, without setting of God at the same time before him, goes so awkwardly about it, and is so dull and heavy, so cold and stupid, in the performance of it, that it is the mere outside and shell of a duty that hath nothing of life or vigour in it, nor indeed any thing of real duty; but it is a mere flat and insipid performance, neither acceptable to God, nor any way profitable to him that doth it: whereas, he that sets God always before him, as he dare not omit any duty which God requires of him, so he dare not perform it in a careless, indifferent manner, nor any other way than as God requires it to be done; as knowing that he takes notice all along, not only of what he doth, but likewise how he doth it: which if you would always remember and think of, while you are performing any duty unto God, you would be so far from running it over in a superficial manner, that

you would think your whole souls too little to be employed in it.

While you are at your private devotions, where none sees you but God, if you would set yourselves solemnly, as in his presence, and duly consider that he hears every word you speak to him, and observes every motion both of your soul and body before him, how grave, how serious, how devout would you be ! how careful to say nothing to him, but what becomes you to speak, and him to hear ! how impartial would you be in examining yourselves ! how heavenly in your meditations ! how earnest in your petitions ! how free from distractions ! how cordial and sincere in the whole performance !

While you are praying or praising God in public, where he hath promised to be present with you in a more peculiar manner, did you really believe that he is so, and accordingly set him all the while before you, how humbly would you prostrate yourselves before him ? with what reverence and godly fear would you serve and worship him ? Your thoughts would be so composed, your minds so raised, and your whole souls so enlarged towards him, that you would think yourselves in heaven, joining with the glorified saints and angels, in admiring, adoring, praising, and magnifying the almighty Creator of the world ; and say with David to him, *A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness*, Psal. lxxxiv. 10. While you hear God's holy word read or expounded to you, did you really believe that he is there present with you, and speaks to you particularly, and acquaints you with his divine will and pleasure, what he would have you to believe and do, that you may continue in his love and favour ; how attentive would you then be, and ready to catch at every expression ? You would then *receive it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh in them who thus believe, and none else*, 1 Thess. ii. 13.

When you are invited to our Lord's table, did you really believe Christ himself will meet you there, and apply all the merits of his death and passion to you, for the pardon of all your sins, how readily would you accept of so gracious an invitation? with what care and diligence would you prepare yourselves for it? And while you were there, did you really believe that you were then in the special presence of Christ himself, your all-sufficient, almighty, all-merciful, all-glorious Saviour; with what shamefacedness and modesty, with what reverence and humility, would you carry yourselves before him? How would you wonder to see the Son of God himself going about by his minister, and offering the bread and water of life to all that hunger and thirst after it? And, how would you hunger, and thirst, and long, till it came to your turns to receive it? And how sweet would it be to your souls? What pleasure and delight would you take in eating and drinking of it? The sacrament would then seem quite another thing to you than what it used to do, and you would esteem it the greatest happiness of your lives, that you have so many opportunities of being made partakers of it.

Thus you see how acting our faith in God and Christ, as really present with us all the while that we are using of them, quickens and invigorates the means of grace and salvation, and makes them effectual to the great ends for which they are appointed; so that we actually obtain the grace and salvation which is administered by them. Indeed the setting of God alway before us is itself one of the best means we can ever use, both to procure and preserve in us a true sense of his divine perfections, and by consequence all manner of grace and virtue which naturally flows from it.

For if we could be alway looking upon God, and beholding his infinite wisdom, and greatness, and love, and goodness to us, our affections would soon be taken off from all things else, and placed only upon him; for nothing would seem wise, or great, or lovely, or good,

or any thing, but only he : by which means our whole souls would be inflamed with love to him, above all things in the world ; which can never be abated, much less extinguished, so long as we keep our eye fixed upon him ; for our eye will still affect our heart, and so our love to God will be rather always growing stronger and stronger, until at length it comes to its highest perfection ; which cannot be till we get to heaven, where, as we shall see God perfectly, we shall love him perfectly.

But even while we are upon earth, he whom our souls love is alway present with us, and manifesting his love to us : and if we really believe that he is so, how can we forbear to rejoice in him, and to please ourselves in pleasing him ? We cannot but delight in the company of those we love, though they be but our fellow-creatures : what delight then must they needs have who love God above all things, in having him always in their company ? wheresoever they are, the best friend they have in the world is always present with them ; and though they cannot see him with their bodily eyes, yet believing him to be so, as the apostle speaks, they *rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory*, 1 Pet. i. 8.

And as this is the way whereby to live and rejoice in the Lord alway, so this is the way also whereby to have the fear of God always before our eyes, even by setting him always before them.

So long as men do not think of God, nor believe him to be near them, it is no wonder if they do not fear him, nor regard whether he be pleased or displeased with them ; but for a man to be fully persuaded that the almighty Creator and Governor of all things is present with him, and yet to stand in no awe of him, is impossible ; as he himself intimates by his prophet, saying, *Fear ye not me ? saith the Lord : will ye not tremble at my presence ?* Jer. v. 22. Can a guilty prisoner see his judge, and not fear him ? Can a known rebel behold his prince frowning upon him, and not fear

him? How much less can sinful mortals look upon the King and Judge of the whole world, as present with them, and not tremble before him? It cannot be: the thoughts of our being always under his eye, would be enough certainly to strike us dead, unless we had some grounds to hope for favour and mercy at his hands; as, blessed be his great name, we have.

For we have his own word for it, that *his mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation*, Luke i. 50. and that *he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy*, Psal. cxlvii.

11. And therefore, as the Wise-man observes, *in the fear of the Lord is strong confidence*, Prov. xiv. 26. for the more we fear him, the more cause we have to trust on him, and to hope for mercy, and all good things we can desire from him: and therefore they who alway set God before them, as they cannot but alway fear him, so they cannot but also put their trust and confidence in him, as always ready to protect and defend them; so that they shall never be moved from that state and condition of life, which he in his infinite wisdom and goodness sees best for them.

This David found by experience, and therefore was confident of it; *because he, saith he, is on my right hand, I shall not be moved*. And this hath been the constant experience of all good men in all ages, even of all who alway set God before them, and so have him alway on their side: and if God be for them who can be against them? if he be with them, what evil can come near them? What need they fear, who have Omnipotence itself alway ready to preserve them, wheresoever they are? This is the argument which he himself makes use of to encourage his people, that they may fear nothing but him: *Fear thou not, saith he, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God; for I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness*, Isa. xli. 10. *When thou passest through the waters,*

I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee ; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee, chap. xliii. 2. He may suffer them to pass through fire and water, but he will not suffer them to be hurt by either of them : he may bring them into trouble, but he will preserve them from the evil of it, and make it really good for them ; and all because he is still with them in it. Thus he was with Noah in the ark, with Joseph in prison, with Israel in the midst of the sea, with Job upon the dunghill, with David upon the mountains, with the three children in the fiery furnace, with Daniel in the lions' den, with Jeremiah in the dungeon, with Jonah in the whale's belly, and with the apostles in the common prison : and being alway with them, how wonderfully did he preserve them, altering often the very course of nature, rather than any thing should hurt them, who set him alway before them ?

And if we set him before us as they did, he will be with us as he was with them ; and then how securely may we walk through all the changes and chances of this mortal life, when we really believe that Almighty God, and Jesus Christ, our most gracious and most merciful Father, is always present with us, by his wisdom to direct us, by his mercy to pardon us, by his grace to assist us, by his Spirit to conduct us, and by his power to defend us from all evil, or to turn it into good. What need we trouble our heads about what may, or what may not happen upon earth, when we know that our heavenly Father always stands by us, and orders every thing that occurs to our advantage ? What need we fear the devil, or all the fiends in hell, so long as the Son of God, *who loved us, and gave himself for us*, is always with us, ready upon all occasions to fight for us, and to enable us to fight for him against his and our ghostly enemies ? What need we be discouraged at the relics of sin within us, seeing the Holy Spirit of God is always with us, and his grace is always sufficient for us ?

What need we fear either shame, or pain, or trouble, or want, or weakness, or sickness, or death, or any evil whatsoever, who have glory, and ease, and joy, and all-sufficiency, and strength, and health, and life, and goodness, even God himself, continually with us? Let us but alway set him before us, and we may alway say with David, *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom then shall I be afraid?* Psal. xxvii. 1. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble: therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters roar and are troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof: the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge,* Psal. xlv. 1, 2, 3, 7. *In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid what man can do unto me,* Psal. xlv. 11. *I have set the Lord alway before me, because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

Who then would not set the Lord alway before him? and who may not do it if he will, seeing no more is required to it, but constantly to believe what we cannot deny, even that he is alway with us? For which purpose therefore let us not suffer ourselves to be led any longer by our senses, but let us live by faith, acting it continually upon God, as present with us, looking over us, and into us, observing all the passages of our life. Whatsoever employment we are about, let us still remember that God sees both what it is, and how we do it. Whatsoever company we are in, let us still remember that God is in it, and takes notice of every thing we think, or speak, or do together. Whithersoever we go, let us still remember that God goes along with us; when we sit down, that he stands by us; and when we rise up, that he helps us. Whenssoever any trouble falls upon us, let us remember that God is present to support us under it, to make us better by it, and, when he

sees good, to deliver us from it. Whatsoever danger we are in, let us still remember, that no danger can be so near us as God is, who is always at hand to defend us from it, and to bless it to us. In short, whatsoever our condition be in this life, let us still remember and believe, that the all-wise God, and our most merciful Father, knows it to be good for us, and is always with us to make it so.

Could we thus accustom ourselves to call God to mind upon all occasions, and actually believe that he is then present with us, as he really is, we should soon learn the divine art of setting him alway before us ; and then how circumspectly should we walk ? how comfortably should we live ? how stedfast and unmoveable should we be in the midst of all the storms and tempests we meet with here below ? We should indeed live next door to heaven, and want nothing to complete our happiness, but to do that which we endeavour perfectly : for to have God alway perfectly in our eye, so as clearly to behold his glory and goodness, is the happiness of heaven ; where our faith being turned into vision, we shall see God face to face, and so be perfectly happy in him. And so far as we set God alway before us upon earth, so much we partake of the joys of heaven, and are so far happy according to our weak capacity in this world, and in the ready way to be fully, perfectly, eternally happy in the next, through his merits and mediation for us, who is always with us, even Jesus Christ our ever-blessed Lord and Saviour : *to whom, with the Father and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory world without end.*

S E R M O N C V I .

PERPETUAL REJOICING THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS.

PHIL. iv. 4.

Rejoice in the Lord alway ; and again I say, Rejoice.

HE that aims at true piety and virtue, that he may be meet to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light, must begin with his heart, and take special care that all be right there : for, as Solomon observeth, *Out of the heart are the issues of life*, Prov. iv. 23. and a greater than Solomon, *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*, Matt. xii. 34. All our words and actions have their rise in the heart, and from thence issue forth into the life ; and therefore God hath given such laws to our hearts, that if they were but duly observed, all his other commandments would be pleasant and easy ; for they all tend to the directing the several motions of our hearts towards himself, that they may all meet and centre in him, as they were at first designed to do. Thus he commands, that our thoughts be always running upon him, and our desires carried after him ; that we live with a constant fear and reverence of his glory and power, and with a sure trust and confidence in his goodness and truth ; that we love him with all our hearts and souls, so as to have no love for any thing else, but in obedience and subordination to him : and if we do that, it follows in course, that we must also rejoice in him ; for that we cannot choose but do it in what we

love. And as we are to love him always, so we are always to rejoice in him ; which, notwithstanding, that we may be the more sure to do, he hath here by his apostle given us a particular command about it, saying, *Rejoice in the Lord alway*. And the better to enforce it upon us, he repeats it again ; *and again I say, Rejoice*.

Which being a duty that the best of men are sometimes apt to forget, or at least to be deficient in, I shall endeavour to explain it more particularly to you, that ye may know how you may and ought to *rejoice in the Lord alway*. For which purpose, taking the words as an entire preposition, as they are of themselves, without troubling you about their coherence with what goes before, or follows them, we may briefly consider,

I. What it is properly to *rejoice in the Lord*.

II. Who are here commanded to do it.

III. How they should *rejoice in the Lord*.

IV That this is to be done *alway*.

V How we may ; and,

VI. Why we ought to do it.

Unto which few heads, all, I think, may be referred that is necessary to be known concerning these words, and the great duty contained in them.

I. What it is properly to rejoice, we may all understand by our own experience, better than by any definition or description that can be given of it : for when we apprehend any thing to be good and agreeable to us, we feel in ourselves a secret kind of complacency and delight in the enjoyment of it, which none can perceive but ourselves ; according to that of the Wise-man, *The heart knoweth his own bitterness ; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy*, Prov. xiv. 10.

But here we must observe, that the joy here spoken of, is no way like the pleasure that ariseth from our senses or fancy being duly touched by their proper objects ; for such sensual pleasures do not affect us as men, but only as animals, and so are common to us with the beasts that perish. But true joy is seated only in

the soul, or rational part of man, as such ; and is a serious, grave, sedate, severe thing, that supports and cheers the heart, and overspreads it with an inward peace, quiet, and satisfaction, arising from something that is of the nature of the soul itself, spiritual and immaterial, and so good and proper for it, that the whole soul is composed, refreshed, and delighted with the sight and fruition of it.

But this nothing in the world can do, but God, the chiefest good, who hath made our souls of such a temper, and of so large capacities, that nothing can fill and satiate them but himself ; and therefore, intending himself to be the only object of their joy and happiness, hath made nothing capable of contributing towards it, any farther than by discovering his divine perfections to us, that we may be able to see so much of him, as may fill our hearts with joy and comfort in him : but still it is only in him that we can truly rejoice, as we are here commanded to do.

II. This will give us some light into the next question to be considered, even who are here commanded to *rejoice in the Lord* ; for it is plain, that neither the unclean spirits, nor wicked or sinful men, can do it if they would ; for although they have the same powers and faculties in their souls as other men have, yet by conversing with nothing but the things of this world, they are so immersed in matter, that they are not capable of any sort of spiritual joys ; and being disordered and out of tune, they are so disagreeable and contrary to the holy nature of God, that they cannot possibly rejoice in him, nor so much as think of him without horror and confusion. *The wicked, as the prophet observes, are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast out mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,* Isa. lvii. 20, 21 nor can be, so long as they are wicked. They may seem to live at ease, and may enjoy the pleasures, as they are called, of this life ; they may, like the rich man in the Gospel, *be clothed*

with purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day ; they may laugh and be merry, and look as if they were the happiest people upon earth ; yet all this while they have no true peace and joy in their hearts ; for they can never rejoice in the Lord, he is not in all their thoughts ; or if he happen to come in, as he sometimes may, against their wills, they are so far from rejoicing, that they are terrified and troubled at it : for being conscious to themselves that they have offended him, and still continue to do so, they can see nothing in him but wrath and vengeance ; and therefore, instead of rejoicing, they should rather be afflicted, and mourn, and weep for their sins, so as to repent of them, and turn with all their hearts unto the Lord, that they may be capable of rejoicing in him, which till then they are not.

I could not forbear to take notice of this, though at the same time it puts me into a great fear, that all I shall say upon this subject, will be lost as to a great part of the congregation, if not to the greatest, even to all such who are still in their sins, who have not their eyes yet opened, so as *to turn from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God* ; for such will not be able to understand what I say, nor know what I mean by rejoicing in the Lord : they could never do it themselves, and therefore cannot imagine how others should. So that all such, I fear, will go out of the church just as they came in, without being any ways affected with what they hear.

But howsoever, in the midst of my fears, I have some hope, that whilst I am speaking to your ears, Almighty God may open some of your hearts, to see the things which belong to your everlasting peace, and how much it concerns you in interest, as well as duty, to leave off your sins, and to strive all ye can to get into the number of those happy souls, who always may, and are always bound to *rejoice in the Lord*.

But whatsoever may be the issue as to such, there are some, I hope, here present, who are fellow-citizens

with the saints, and of the household of God. These will be glad to hear of their duty, that they may better know how to do it; especially such a duty as this, which is likewise their happiness and privilege. These also will soon apprehend what is said about rejoicing in the Lord, it being a thing which they frequently do. And having often felt the sweetness of it, they will be the more easily persuaded to do it always, as they are here commanded.

For that this command is given to the saints, and to them only, is plain, in that the apostle writes only to them. He directs this epistle *to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi*, chap. i. 1. And looking upon them as his brethren in Christ, he saith to them, *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord*, chap. iii. 1. And again, in the beginning of this chapter, he calls them *his brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, his joy and crown*; which none could be, but the saints before mentioned: and to them he here saith, *Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice*. And so the Scripture all along calls upon the saints or righteous, and upon none else, to rejoice in the Lord. *Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous*, said David, *for praise is comely for the upright*, Psal. xxxiii. 1. and xcvii. 12. for the upright, not for the wicked and unrighteous: grief and sorrow becomes them better than joy and praise. And elsewhere he saith to God, *Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee*, Psal. v. 11. They who love him, as be sure all his saints and servants do, they must needs be joyful in him, for that very reason, because they love him, and because they are here commanded to *rejoice in the Lord always*.

Rejoice in the Lord, in Jehovah, the almighty and everlasting God, the first cause of all things, the chiefest, the only good, and so the only object of all true joy. Rejoice in his wisdom, that is infinite; in his

power, that is boundless ; in his word, that is infallible ; in his judgments, that are unsearchable ; in his name, that is great, wonderful, and holy ; in his goodness, that is over all his works.

Rejoice in the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, who commanded all things out of nothing, by the word of his power ; who hung the earth upon nothing ; gave bounds to the sea, life and breath to animals ; being to all things that be ; who spread out the heavens like a curtain, and therein set the sun and moon, and an innumerable company of stars, giving them light, and heat, and laws, which cannot be broken ; who made man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, whereby he became a living soul, capable of reflecting upon and rejoicing in him that made him. *Let Israel therefore rejoice in him that made him ; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King*, Psal. cxlix. 2. *For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy works : I will triumph in the works of thy hands. O Lord, how great are thy works ! thy thoughts are very deep*, Psal. xcii. 4, 5.

Rejoice in the Lord, the almighty Preserver of the whole world, who upholdeth all things he made with the power of the same word by which he made them ; who causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of men ; who giveth food to all flesh, and blesseth it to the maintenance and support of life. *The Lord also is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble*, Psal. xlv. 1. *He is my strength and shield ; my heart trusted on him, and I am helped : therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise him*, Psal. xxviii. 7. *Because thou, O Lord, hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice*, Psal. lxiii. 7.

Rejoice in the Lord, the Lord of the whole earth, the Lord of all the world, who rules and reigns over all things that are, and doth whatsoever he pleaseth in heaven and in earth, in the sea and all deep places ; or-

dering and disposing of all and every thing that is, with such infinite wisdom and goodness, that nothing can happen but what shall tend some way or other to the glory of his great name, and to the benefit of all those who serve and honour him. How then can such forbear to be glad and rejoice in him! *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof*, Psal. xcvi. 1. *O let the nations rejoice and be glad, for thou, Lord, shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth*, Psal. lxxv. 4.

Above all, *rejoice in the Lord* our Saviour, *the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe*, 1 Tim. iv. 10. the strength, the God of our salvation; our salvation itself. *For the Lord is my strength, and song, and is become my salvation*, Psal. cxviii. 14. The very naming of which is enough to fill our hearts with joy and gladness, as much, and more than they are able to hold: that the almighty Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the whole world in general, should in a particular and wonderful manner become the Saviour, yea, the salvation of mankind: that he, for that purpose, should be conceived of his own Spirit, and born of a woman, so as to be both *perfect God, and perfect man, of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting*: that having thus taken our nature upon him, he in that should perform exact obedience to his own laws, and then offer it up as a sacrifice for our transgressions of them: that as he was delivered for our offences, he was raised again for our justification: that he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him: that being raised from the dead, he went up into heaven, and was there set at the right hand of God the Father, the next in power and honour to him; that the man Christ Jesus is there exalted above all the creatures in the world, angels, principalities, and powers being made subject to him; that he is now there appearing in the presence of God for us, the Mediator be-

tween God and us, our Advocate with the Father, ever living to make intercession for us : that we have such a glorious, such an almighty Saviour in heaven, continually taking care of all things necessary to bring us thither ; that he is therefore making such effectual intercession for us, by virtue of the death he suffered for our sins, that they are all pardoned as soon as repented of : that he is there exalted by the right hand of God, to be a Prince as well as Saviour, to give repentance also, as well as forgiveness of sins : that nothing can happen in the world, by the general providence of God, but he is there ready to bless it to us, and make it turn to our advantage : that by him we have access to God the Father, and can truly call him *our God* and *our Father* too : that whatsoever we ask in his name, we are sure to have it, so far as it is good for us : that he from thence supplies us with all things necessary both for life and godliness, that we may never want any thing that can contribute to our sanctification and salvation by him : that he from thence sends down his holy Spirit upon us, and so by it is alway present with us, to direct us what to do, and to assist us in the doing of it : that his grace is always sufficient for us, and his strength made perfect in our weakness, *so that we can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth us* : that he also, as the Sun of righteousness in heaven, reflects such a lustre upon what we do, that although we be imperfect in ourselves, yet we are accepted of as righteous through him : in short, that he is now in heaven, preparing a place for us, that we may live with him there, and rejoice in him for ever !

Can we hear all this, and our hearts not burn within us ? How well might the angel say to the shepherds at the birth of Christ, *Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy that shall be to all people !* for what greater joy can there be than this, that we have such a Saviour, who is *able to save to the utmost all that come unto God by him !* How well then may we say with the blessed

Virgin, *My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour* ' and with the prophet, *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness!* Isa. lxi. 10. and with the Psalmist, *O come, let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and shew ourselves joyful in him with psalms!* Psal. xcv. 1, 2. and with the apostle in my text, *Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice* '.

Rejoice in the Lord alway; or, as it is elsewhere expressed, *Rejoice evermore*, 1 Thess. v. 16. This is not a duty to be performed only now and then, but at all times, upon all occasions, in all conditions; whatsoever happens, we must still take care to keep our hearts in such a temper, that we may rejoice in the Lord, whether we have or have not any thing else to rejoice in. It is the Wise-man's advice, *In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider*, Eccles. vii. 14. When we prosper in the world, and all things fall out according to our desire, it is an easy matter to be joyful, and we commonly are so: but it is not so easy then to rejoice in the Lord, but rather the more difficult. For when he gives us all things richly to enjoy, we are apt to set our hearts upon them, and to take so much pleasure in them, that we forget him that gave them. So that it is a very difficult thing to get and keep our hearts in such a frame, that in the midst of all our temporal enjoyments, we can rejoice in the Lord more than in them, and in them only as they come from him, and are tokens of his love and favour to us. Which therefore we should strive all we can to do, that we may not take up with the seeming pleasures of the world, instead of that real and substantial joy that is to be had in him who gave them, and who gave them on purpose that we might rejoice the more in him.

And if they who are in adversity would rightly consider, they will find, that they have then also cause to rejoice in the Lord, the same as when they are in the greatest prosperity ; forasmuch as that also is a sign of that fatherly care and love that he hath for all his sons and servants : *for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*, Heb. xii. 6.¹ And who can but rejoice in every token of God's love, and in him who is pleased to shew it ; especially, when any trouble befalls them for his sake, and he enables them to bear it to his honour and glory ? this is so great a favour, that the disciples *rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name*, Acts v. 41. And St. Paul could truly say, *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake*, 2 Cor. xii. 10. To some people these may seem strange things for a man to take pleasure in, but they who are the faithful servants of Jesus Christ, find so much pleasure in doing and suffering any thing they can for him, that they have little or no sense of the suffering, but that is swallowed up with the joy they have in him, for honouring them so far, as to lay it upon them for his own sake.

But after all, it is much the same thing as to our rejoicing in the Lord, the chiefest good, whether we have or have not the good things, as they are called, here below ; for if we have them, they can afford us no manner of comfort without him ; and if we have them not, we can rejoice in him as much as if we had, or rather more. For being all naturally desirous of joy and comfort, and having nothing else from whence we can have it, but only God, our own inclinations will put us upon applying ourselves to him for it, which otherwise, perhaps, we should not think of : which may be one great reason wherefore God is often pleased to deny the comforts of this life to his best and dearest children, even lest they should take up with them instead of him, with the streams instead of the fountain ; but that they may

always rejoice in him, and in him alone; which they endeavour therefore all they can to do, in the midst of all the changes and chances of this mortal life, whether they have more or less; whether he gives or takes from them; whether they live in plenty or poverty, in honour or disgrace; whether he grants or disappointeth them of their expectations and desires, it is all one to them; they can still sing with the prophet, *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation*, Hab. iii. 17, 18.

O divine temper of mind! Thrice happy they who can attain unto it! But how is it possible that we should thus rejoice in the Lord? we, frail and sinful creatures; we, who are tossed to and fro with so many storms and tempests; we, who never continue in one stay; we, who are so often ruffled and discomposed by one cross accident or other, though we may perhaps sometimes rejoice in the Lord; how is it possible that we should do it always? To that I answer, that whatsoever God hath commanded us to do, it is possible for us to do it, otherwise he would not have commanded it. But as we can keep none of his commandments without great care and diligence, so neither can we keep this, except we set ourselves in good earnest about it, and use all such means as conduce any way towards it.

Among which the first is, that *we keep our consciences always void of offence, both towards God and towards man*. For he, whose conscience accuseth him of any habitual sin and offence against God, can look upon God no otherwise than as angry and displeased with him, and therefore, instead of rejoicing in him, will rather be troubled at the thoughts of him; like the devils, who *believe and tremble*. But, as I observed before, this command is given only to such whose hearts

are right with God, and can therefore say with his apostle, *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world*, 2 Cor. i. 12.

But such also, in order to their rejoicing always in the Lord, must keep a strict watch over themselves, and live as much as it is possible above the temper of their own bodies. For while we are in the body, our souls are subject to the humours that are predominant in it; some of which are very apt to impede and hinder us in the exercise of so spiritual a duty as this is. The sanguine are too airy for such solid joys, and the melancholy too dull and heavy for such high flights as are necessary to our reaching of them. I do not deny, but that a little melancholy may be sometimes as good as ballast to a ship, to keep it steady; but too much is apt to sink the soul into so much grief and sorrow, that it is very difficult for it to raise up itself so high as to rejoice at all, much less in God himself. And therefore they who are subject to this distemper, must take special heed that they do not give way to it, nor indulge themselves, as they commonly do, in it, but must do all they can to suppress it, or at least to keep it so much under, that it may not overpower the soul and divert it from thinking upon God, and rejoicing in him. Which they may, and ought to do, in the midst of all these dismal and troublesome thoughts, which this black humour is apt to suggest into them, so as to be able to say with David, *In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts, O Lord, delight my soul*, Psal. xciv. 19. and with the apostle, *As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*, 2 Cor. vi. 10. Though as men, they are full of grief and sorrow, yet as Christians, at the same time, they rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation.

For Christians, as such, are alway the same, not carried about with every wind that blows without them,

nor with every humour that moves within them ; but always sedate and calm, and so in a right disposition to enjoy God, and rejoice in him, in whatsoever state or condition they are. This is that which the apostle here requires in this very case : for having said, *Rejoice in the Lord always*, he adds, in the very next verse, *let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand.* τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν, let your equanimity, or evenness of temper in all conditions, be so constant and apparent, that all men may see it, and the Lord too, who is at hand to assist you in it, and ere long will reward you for it. But for that purpose, he adds also, *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God*, ver. 6. Whereby is intimated, that in order to our rejoicing in the Lord, as is before commanded, we must not suffer our hearts to be distracted with the cares of this life, but let them hang loose and indifferent to all things here below, and fixed only upon God. We must live above this world, and have our conversation in heaven, where only these true joys are to be found ; otherwise we can never have them.

For this purpose therefore, if riches increase, set not your hearts upon them : if honours, suffer not yourselves to be puffed up with the conceit of them : if worldly pleasures, look not upon them as they come, but as they go, and leave a sting behind them : if troubles or afflictions befall you, consider whence they come, and whither they tend ; that they come from your heavenly Father, are designed for your good, and will effect it too, if you do but make a right use of them ; that these *light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor iv. 17. that *all things work together for good to those who love God*, Rom. viii. 28. So that nothing can happen, but ye have cause to rejoice in the Lord, and thank him for it.

Remember also the words of the Lord Jesus, how he

said to his disciples, *Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*, John xvi. 20. For this is an exceeding great comfort in the midst of all our sorrow, that our sorrow will not only have an end, but it will end in joy, and in joy too that will never have an end; and all through the goodness and mercy of God, in whom therefore we have alway infinite cause to rejoice, more than we can ever have to be sorrowful for any thing in the world.

The greatest and truest cause of sorrow is sin; that we have broken the laws, dishonoured the name, and so have incurred the displeasure of Almighty God: for this we can never be sorrowful enough: yet nevertheless, in the midst of this godly sorrow also, we have infinite cause to rejoice in the Lord our God and Saviour, in that he himself hath reconciled us to himself by his own blood: that he in our nature suffered the punishment which was due unto our sins, and is now a propitiation for them at the right hand of the Father: that in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, of all our sins: they were all laid upon him, and therefore none of them shall be charged upon us: for, *who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again: who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*, Rom. viii. 33, 34. *Whom therefore having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*, 1 Pet. i. 8.

This is joy unspeakable indeed, and so full of glory, that the world knows nothing of it: none but they who live with a constant and firm belief in God our Saviour, without which it is impossible to *rejoice in the Lord* at all, much more to do it *alway*. And therefore, as ever we desire to do what we have now heard, we must alway keep our faith fixed upon Christ our Mediator and Advocate with the Father; and in his name pray for the

Holy Spirit, to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by his inspiration, that we may have a right judgment in all things, and evermore rejoice in his holy comfort, who is therefore called *the Comforter*, because we can have no true comfort but by him : but by him we may have the greatest that any creature is capable of, comfort in God himself, the fountain of all true joy and comfort ; so as to rejoice always in him, and that too, not only in a faint and weak manner, according to our narrow capacities, but by the sweet influences, and most powerful assistance of the Holy Spirit, which proceedeth from himself.

This therefore is that which I must advise you all to do ; all such, I mean, as live in the true faith and fear of God, and make it your chief care and study to please, and serve, and honour him. I speak not to them who are still in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity, and so are altogether unacquainted with those celestial joys, which are not only above them, but contrary to their corrupt and sinful inclinations. But as for such among you, who strive all ye can to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, take ye special care to walk in this, as well as in any other of them ; this being not only one of these commandments, but one of those without which the other can never be kept aright : for ye must not only do the will of God, but delight to do it ; which ye can never do, without rejoicing in him, whose will it is, and who assists you all the while ye are doing it.

You profess to serve God, take heed that ye do not dishonour him, by living a melancholy and disconsolate sort of a life, as if ye served a hard task-master, that gives you work to do, without furnishing you with necessities for it. For this would be a great reflection upon him and his service, and discourage others from entering into it. But as ye serve the greatest and best Master in the world, do it with all the cheerfulness and alacrity that ye can ; rejoicing continually in his holy name, and

in his infinite mercy and kindness to you, in that he is pleased to admit you into the number of his own servants. This will make his service both easy and pleasant to you : and though it be far short of what ye owe him, yet he will be well pleased with it for Christ Jesus' sake, and in him also plentifully reward you for it. He will give you all ye can desire, to make ye happy. *Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart,* Psal. xxxvii. 4.

Blessed therefore is the people, O Lord, that can rejoice in thee ; they shall walk in the light of thy countenance : their delight shall be daily in thy name, and in thy righteousness shall they make their boast, Psal. lxxxix. 15, 16. They live in heaven while they are upon earth ; and whilst other people feed upon husks, like brutes, they enjoy the same kind of pleasures, though not in so great a measure, here below, which the glorified saints and angels do above, who are always rejoicing in the Lord, and singing forth the praises of his holy name.

And, as we desire to do it with them hereafter, we must begin it here ; and spend the rest of our time so, that we may be duly qualified fully to partake of those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore ; even that we may perfectly, continually, and eternally rejoice in our most mighty Creator, most merciful Redeemer, and most gracious Comforter, one God, blessed for ever.

S E R M O N C V I I .

UNIVERSAL THANKSGIVING THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS.

1 THESS. v. 18.

*In every thing give thanks : for this is the will of God
in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

ALTHOUGH religion, or the constant devotion of ourselves to the service of God, be commonly thought to be a very disconsolate and melancholy course of life, by those who never made trial of it ; yet they who have, find by their own experience, that it is the most pleasant and comfortable way of living they can ever take to : forasmuch as it reduceth all the faculties of their souls, and members of their bodies, into their proper frame and temper, and exerciseth them continually in the great work which they were at first designed and fitted for. By which means they are not only quiet and at ease, always living as it were in their proper element, but likewise feel a sweet kind of joy and pleasure in their minds, arising from the apprehension, that he that made them is well-pleased with them for doing the work he made them for, and so answering his end in making of them.

And hence it is, that all who are truly pious, and sincerely endeavour to serve and obey God, take more delight in doing that than any thing, or all things else. As we see in David, who often professeth, that the

commands of God were dearer to him than *gold and silver*, and *sweeter than honey or the honey-comb*. Neither must we ascribe this to conceit or fancy, but to the will of God, who hath so adapted our nature to his commands, or his commands to our nature, that every act of sincere obedience to his commands is as pleasing and grateful to the pure and pious soul that duly performs it, as it is to God himself: and whosoever doth not thus *delight in the law of God*, as St. Paul did, *after the inner man*, it is because his soul is corrupted and out of tune; and therefore cannot relish such pure and spiritual delights which naturally flow from a due observation of God's commands; and can never be separated from it without sin: for the same God, who hath commanded us to do his will, hath commanded us also to delight in the doing of it; and so hath made it as much our duty to live cheerfully and comfortably, as it is *to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*.

This I confess, at first sight, may seem strange doctrine to many of you; men's minds being generally prepossessed with such prejudices against religion, as to fancy they cannot set about it in good earnest, but they must bid adieu to all the pleasures of human life: whereas, in truth, there is no true pleasure to be had without it; neither is there any thing in it, but what may and ought to be pleasant to them: which were you all convinced of, you would need no other arguments to persuade you to the constant exercise of true piety and virtue, as the only means whereby to obtain what you all desire, even to live pleasantly and happily, both in this world and the next.

This therefore is that which I shall now endeavour to demonstrate to you; and for that purpose desire you to observe, that the apostle here, among other things, lays down three general rules for all Christians to observe; *Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks*. All which being dictated by

the command and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, are as necessary to be observed, as any law or precept whatsoever in the whole Bible ; and that too not only now and then, but *evermore, without ceasing, in every thing* : so that all and every one of these duties ought to run through the whole course of our lives.

First, we must *rejoice evermore*, continually, without intermission. Whatsoever happens in the world, we must still rejoice : in what ? in him that governs it ; as the same apostle elsewhere explains himself, saying, *Rejoice in the Lord always ; and again I say, Rejoice*, Phil. iv. 4. where, as he presseth this duty upon us twice with the same breath, so he directs us likewise to the proper object of it, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the all-wise, all-good, almighty, all-sufficient, and eternal God, who being always the only object of our joy, we ought always to rejoice in him only, both when we have, and when we have not, any thing else to rejoice in.

And as we must thus *rejoice evermore*, so we must *pray without ceasing*. Not that we are bound to be always upon our knees, for we have many other duties to perform, as well as prayer ; and though we may and ought to rejoice, we cannot pray in them all : and therefore the apostle here purposely alters the phrase from πάντοτε, *evermore*, or always, to ἀδιαλείπτως, *without ceasing*, not without intermitting, but without omitting or neglecting the duty, whensoever it is required of us, or we have an opportunity to perform it : we must never leave off our daily prayers as long as we live ; but whatsoever happens, we must be sure to implore the mercy and grace of God every day ; or, as the apostle elsewhere words it, we *must be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known our requests to God*, Phil. iv. 6. where we may observe, that the apostle orders thanksgiving to be always joined with our prayers ; and so he doth in my text. For as we are to *rejoice in the Lord always*, so in order thereunto, we must *pray* unto him

without ceasing, that being the means whereby to keep our minds always fixed upon him, and so in a right frame and disposition to rejoice always in him : but for that purpose, as we pray unto him for what we want, we must likewise give him thanks for what we have : and therefore he adds, *In every thing give thanks ; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

Where we may first observe in general, that all these duties have one and the same object, though not expressed, yet supposed as certainly known to all Christians, even the most high God. It is in him we must *rejoice evermore* : it is to him we must *pray without ceasing* : it is to him we must *give thanks for every thing*. And as they have all the same object, so they have the same obligation too. We are as much obliged to *rejoice evermore*, as we are to *pray without ceasing* ; we are as much obliged to *pray without ceasing*, as we are to *give thanks in every thing* ; and as much obliged to give thanks in every thing, as we are either to *rejoice*, or to *pray without ceasing*. So that whosoever doth not perform all these duties, performs none of them as he ought : for he that performs any one aright, must do it in obedience to God's command ; but the same God that hath commanded one, hath commanded the other too : and therefore he that performs any one of them in obedience to God's command, cannot but perform the rest also upon the same account.

Hence therefore we may see how necessary it is to *rejoice always*, as necessary as it is to *pray*, or *in every thing to give thanks* ; which we can never do, except we rejoice in every thing : for no man can be truly thankful for what he is not really glad of. And therefore seeing we are here commanded in every thing to give thanks, it necessarily follows, that whatsoever happens in the world, we must still be glad and rejoice in him that orders it ; and by consequence we have no time allowed us for melancholy and discontent : but as we desire always to live up to the rules of the Gospel as

becometh Christians, we must always keep up our minds in a cheerful frame and temper, that we may be always disposed and prepared to *give thanks in every thing*, and for all things, Ephes. v. 23.

Which that you may all at least know how to do, we shall briefly consider what it is properly to *give thanks*; how that ought to be done *in every thing*; and then the reason here alleged for it, because *this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*.

The first thing to be considered is, what we are here to understand by *giving of thanks*, or wherein that duty properly consists. For which purpose we may observe, that the first thing necessary to our giving thanks, is to acknowledge God in every thing: that nothing falls out, but by his care and providence, and according to his will and pleasure: that it is *in him we live, and move, and have our being*: that we have nothing but what we receive from him, who is the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift: that as all things are made, so all things are governed and managed by him: that nothing can be, or act, or move, without him: that not so much as *a sparrow can fall to the ground without him*: and, that *the very hairs of our heads are all numbered* by him; as our Lord hath taught us, Matt. x. 29, 30. He that lives not in a constant sense and firm belief of this, can never heartily give thanks to God for any thing that is.

But in order to our giving him due thanks for every thing, it is not enough to acknowledge his care and providence over the world in general, but we must do it particularly in every thing that is, or happens in the world; so as still to behold and admire his divine perfections shining forth in it; and especially his wisdom, power, and goodness: his wisdom, in the contriving; his power, in the effecting; and his goodness, in his ordering of it for the best.

First, we must acknowledge his wisdom in contriving and designing of every particular thing, so as to look

upon it as the issue and product of the same infinite wisdom, that projected the system of the world, and the rare harmony which appears in the whole creation. For his wisdom is certainly the same in every thing that it is in all things; and therefore ought to be so acknowledged, otherwise we can never be truly thankful for any thing, as not knowing but that it might have been better contrived than it is; whereas, if I be fully persuaded in my mind, that every thing that happens, proceeds from the same wisdom that made all things, and therefore must needs be the best that could happen at that time; so that if it had been any otherwise than just as it is, it would have been worse both for the creation in general, and for myself in particular; if I be fully persuaded, I say, of this, I must needs give God the praise, and thanks that is due unto him for every thing that is, or rather my very acknowledging of it is my thanking him for it, because hereby I agnize and celebrate the glory of his wisdom appearing in it.

But then, we must not only acknowledge his wisdom, but his power too; for that also manifesteth itself in every thing, as much as it doth in all things, and in the least as well as in the greatest. As nothing is impossible with God, so neither is one thing more possible than another, but every thing is equally an argument or demonstration of his omnipotence, and ought to be so acknowledged; and whosoever doth that, may be truly said *in every thing to give thanks*: because hereby he professeth, that whatsoever falls out, it is brought about by God; that whosoever may be the instrument, he is the principal agent in it; that whatsoever secondary causes may concur towards the effecting of it, he is still the first; and therefore, that all the glory of it is due to him alone.

But when we acknowledge his wisdom and power, we must not forget his goodness, which equally extendeth itself also to all and every thing that is. As in the beginning, when God had finished the creation, it is,

said, that *he beheld every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good*, Gen. i. 31. so it hath been ever since, so it is now, and so it always will be: whatsoever God doth, is very good, as good as it can be made; good in itself, and good for all his creatures in general, and good for every one in particular. And therefore the Psalmist observes, that *the Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all his works*, Psal. cxlv. 9. which is so universally true, that if it was left to our own choice, we could not possibly desire any thing better, nor so good as what befalls us, with all the circumstances that attend it.

He that lives under a constant sense of this, must needs give thanks for every thing, as believing every thing to be for the best, and therefore adoring that infinite goodness that makes it so.

This therefore is the first thing required to our giving of thanks in every thing, even to acknowledge every thing to come from God, from wisdom, power, and goodness itself, and, by consequence, that it is the wisest, the greatest, and the best thing in its kind that it could be, all circumstances considered. But that we may be duly affected with it, so as to be truly thankful for it, as we acknowledge the infinite perfections of God in every thing that is, so we must likewise acknowledge our own imperfections and unworthiness of any thing that is good for us. For whatsoever God doth for us, if we think it is no more than what we have merited, or deserved at his hands, we can never heartily thank him for it, nor look upon ourselves as bound to do it: for no thanks are due to any one for paying what he owes us: but if it were possible for us to merit any thing at the hands of God, God himself would be indebted to us, not we to him, for that; and therefore, when he pays us, we must thank ourselves rather than him for it: for by this rule, we did more than what we were bound to do for him, but he doth no more than what he was bound to do for us;

in that he only pays us the wages, which we by our great care and pains had merited from him ; for which we can be no way obliged to return him thanks : insomuch that they who look upon themselves as over-righteous, and their works as meritorious before God, whatsoever they may pretend, they can never perform this duty as they ought ; for they can never really think it a duty which they ought to perform, in that whatsoever God doth for them, they still fancy it to be no more than the price of their own works, for the payment whereof they are no way obliged to give him any thanks ; or if they do, it is a work of supererogation, which he is bound to recompense some other way.

But why do I speak so much of that ? For how can we poor sinful mortals ever do more than what we are bound to do for him, from whom we receive our very being, and by whom alone it is that we can do any thing ? Alas ! although we had been perfectly free both from original and actual sin ; although we were as pure and spotless as the holy angels themselves ; although all and every one of our thoughts, words, and actions had been exactly conformable to these wise and righteous laws, which he that made us hath set before us ; what is all this more than what we were before obliged to ? Doth not reason itself dictate, doth not the holy Scripture all along confirm it, doth not our great Master himself teach us with his own mouth, that *when we have done all things* that are commanded us, we are still to acknowledge we are but *unprofitable servants* ; *we have done what was our duty to do*, and no more ? Luke xvii. 10.

But, alas ! how far are we from that ? Which of us can say, that we have done all that was our duty to do ? or that we have done the thousandth part of it ? Nay, which of us can say, that we ever did any one duty exactly as we ought to do it ? *Is there a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not* ; whose works are so pure and perfect, that God himself can

find no fault in them? I wish there were; but where to find them, I know not: but this I know, that our bad actions far exceed our good ones, both in weight and number, and that the very best we ever did are so imperfect, that they deserved not in themselves to be termed good: and by consequence, if we do merit any thing at the hands of God by them, it cannot be his grace and favour, but rather his wrath and fury. He may justly punish us, but cannot be obliged to reward us for them. So that, if we look no farther than the good works, if they may be so called, that we have done since we came into the world, we must needs acknowledge ourselves unworthy of any of those blessings which God is pleased to bestow upon us; and therefore are bound to give him thanks for them, Gen. xxxii. 10. As the apostle himself also here intimates, in that he requires us to *give thanks* for every thing; which quite overthrows the pretended meritoriousness of good works: for if we must *give thanks for every thing*, be sure we can merit nothing by what we do; seeing all the glory of it must be ascribed to God, and not to us, and we must thank him, not ourselves, for it.

But that we may do that aright, we must not only acknowledge that we never merited any favour or blessing from him, by the good works which we have endeavoured to perform, but likewise, that by our manifold sins and offences against him, we have justly deserved to have all the curses executed upon us, that he in his law hath threatened against wicked and sinful men; such as we cannot but all confess ourselves to have been; being conscious to ourselves that we were not only born, but also have lived in sin all our days, in all manner of sin, both of omission and commission; always doing what we ought not to do, or else not doing what we ought, at least not as we ought to do it. But every sin, as it is a transgression of God's law, it must needs be likewise an offence to his divine Majesty, who gives us our very life and being, and all the good things

we have; and who may therefore justly deprive us of them, and lay all manner of punishment upon us, for any one sin that we ever committed: what then may he do for all; for all those many and horrid sins, which we all stand guilty of before him? Or rather, what may he not do? For we all lie at his mercy, and must confess, with the prophet, that *it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not*, Lam. iii. 22. It is of his mercies, his infinite mercies and compassions, that we are here at this time, and not upon our sick bed; that we are here, and not in prison; that we are here, and not in hell.

Now, he who thus acknowledgeth God's infinite wisdom, power, and goodness in every thing that is, who acknowledgeth himself unworthy of having any thing that is good, and therefore acknowledgeth God's mercy also, as well as goodness, in every good thing he hath, such a one may be truly said to give thanks in every thing; all the thanks that we can give to God consisting only in such a recognition and acknowledgment of him, as I have now described. And therefore, in all the Old Testament, as I remember, there is no other word ever used by the Holy Ghost for our giving of thanks to God, but only such as signify our acknowledgment of him: as where it is said, *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever*: the words in the original are, *חסדו הדרו ליהוה כי טוב כי לעולם*, *Acknowledge to the Lord that he is good, that his mercy endureth for ever*, Psal. cvii. 1 where we may likewise see, what it is that we must acknowledge in God, in order to our thanking of him, even his goodness and his mercy. And this, as I could easily shew, is the constant language of the holy Scriptures, wherein God was pleased at first to reveal his will to mankind: whereby he hath plainly acquainted us, how he would have us to give him thanks, even by acknowledging him in every thing: which therefore, whosoever doth, may be properly said to perform the duty enjoined in my text.

But here we must farther observe, that though this acknowledgment of God, wherein our gratitude or thankfulness consisteth, be seated only in the mind, and is indeed nothing else but a quick and lively sense of his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness in every thing that happens to us ; and of his infinite mercy in every good thing he bestows upon us ; yet wheresoever it is sincere and true, it always manifests itself in our words and actions. In our words, by praising and magnifying those divine perfections which we acknowledge in all God's dispensations towards us. And therefore in Hebrew, the same word that signifies our acknowledging, or giving thanks, is used also for our praising God, to shew that they are both one and the same thing diversly expressed ; the one in the heart only, the other also with the tongue, but so, that they always go together ; for no man can be truly thankful to God, but he must needs praise him ; and no man can heartily praise God, without being thankful to him : and therefore, he that would do either, must be sure to do both. He that would give thanks in every thing, must praise God for every thing ; this being one of the ways which God himself hath prescribed, whereby to express our thankfulness unto him, even by praising and celebrating his great and glorious name, for his wisdom, and power, and goodness, and mercy, for all his infinite perfections, and his wonderful works to the sons of men in general, and to us in particular, whom he hath made, redeemed, and still preserves, on purpose to praise and glorify him, as we do this day.

But though this be one, it is not the only way whereby we ought to express our thankfulness to God, our almighty Creator, our most merciful Redeemer, and our continual Benefactor ; for we must do it *not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and walking in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.* This is giving of thanks for every thing indeed, when we serve and glo-

rify God in every thing we do ; for this is an open and actual acknowledgment that we have nothing but what we receive from his goodness and mercy, by employing every thing we have to his honour and glory. By this means, as every thing God doth will afford matter of praise and thankfulness to us, so every thing we do will be an expression of it to him ; and so we shall fully and effectually perform the great and heavenly duty here enjoined by the apostle, saying, *In every thing give thanks.*

In every thing ; not only in some, or many, or most things ; no nor only in all things in general, but in every thing particularly, without any exception, or mental reservation : we must give thanks in every thing ; in every thing we have, in every thing we are, in every thing we do, and in every thing we suffer too. But then we must take special notice of the expression : it is not said, *for* every thing, but, *in every thing give thanks* : for sufferings, as such, cannot be properly the subject-matter of our praise and thankfulness, by reason of our natural aversion to them, and because, as such, they are the effects of God's displeasure, which we are bound to fear and dread above all things in the world, and therefore cannot be bound at the same time to praise and thank him for them. But howsoever, there is no suffering that befalls us in this world, but there is something in it that is designed for our good, and will really be so, if we do but make a right use of it : and that seems to be the reason why the apostle doth not say *for*, but *in every thing give thanks* ; because although there may be some things for which we cannot be obliged properly to give thanks, yet there is nothing in the world but hath something in it for which we ought to do it : as we shall see more plainly in the whole series of this discourse ; wherein I shall endeavour to shew what cause we have to give thanks in every thing that any ways concerns us ; as indeed all things in the world some way or other do. But how-

soever, to make the discourse more useful and practical, I shall instance more especially in such things as more intimately concern us, as having a particular relation to our souls, bodies, or estates. And if we have cause to give thanks in all such things, there can be nothing in the world but we ought to do it in.

First therefore, by these things which concern our souls, I mean all such things as have any relation to our present serving, or future enjoyment of God; to our being made holy here, and happy hereafter: for those are the things wherein our souls are principally concerned. And indeed we can never be sufficiently thankful that we have souls which are capable of such things as these, even of knowing, and honouring, and enjoying God, and of being thankful to him that made them so, and that made them so on purpose that they might be thankful unto him for it, and for every thing else wherein he hath manifested his love and mercy to them: as what love, what mercy did he not manifest unto our souls, when he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, for no other end but to redeem and raise them up from the state of sin and misery into which they were fallen? In which one instance, there were so many mercies contained, that we can never reckon them all up, much less acknowledge them as we ought: yet howsoever, we ought to do it as well as we can, by giving thanks for every thing that the Son of God hath done or suffered for us; *for the mystery of his holy incarnation; for his holy nativity and circumcision; for his baptism, fasting, and temptation; for his agony and bloody sweat; for his cross and passion; for his precious death and burial; for his glorious resurrection and ascension; for his sitting on the right hand of God, and there making intercession for us; for his sending the Holy Ghost, and still continuing it in his church unto this day: in all, and every one of these, and such like things, which Christ hath done, or still is doing for us, we ought to be always giving thanks; it being only*

upon their account that we have any thing at all to be thankful for, or grace to be thankful for any thing we have.

But as God would never have shewed us any mercy at all, except his Son had first satisfied his justice for our sins; so now there is no mercy whatsoever, but God, for his sake, is always ready to bestow it upon us. And whatsoever good things we have, we must acknowledge them all to come from God's mercy to us in his only Son, our only Saviour Christ; without whom we could never have had any one thing, that would have been really good for us; whereas there is nothing that either is or can be really good for us, but we either have, or may have it by him. And indeed how many and great blessings do we all at this time enjoy by him, for which we ought to be always giving thanks? By him we were all born and bred in the best and purest part of his holy catholic church, now militant upon earth: by him our church, after it had been oppressed many years, was miraculously restored again, and is still as wonderfully preserved, and will be so, I hope, to the end of the world: by him we enjoy the oracles of God in our own native tongue, so as to be able to consult them every day: by him we have his holy sacraments duly and constantly administered among us, according to his own institution and appointment: by him we can meet together in God's own house, to pray unto him, to praise his holy name, and hear his word every day in the week, and at his own table every Lord's day to feed upon his mystical body and blood, so as to partake of all the merits of that death which he suffered for us: by him we are faithfully instructed in all things necessary to be known, believed, or done, in order to our salvation by him: by him we have a constant succession of bishops, priests, and deacons among us, to rule and govern us, to reprove, admonish, or correct us, if we do amiss; to resolve our doubts, to satisfy our scruples, to comfort the disconsolate, to relieve the afflicted, to

strengthen the weak, and to guide and direct us all in the right way to bliss : by him we are constantly put in mind of our whole duty, both to God and man, *how to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world ; how to fast and pray, and to give alms ; how to be meek, and humble, and loyal, and charitable, and just in all our dealings ; how to love, and fear, and serve, and honour, and obey God, and in every thing to give thanks unto him.* In short, we have every thing, by the merits of our blessed Saviour, that can any way conduce to the making of our souls happy, and therefore must needs be obliged *in every thing to give thanks to God*, for him by whom we have it, as well as for every thing that we have by him.

And although our bodies be not of so pure and spiritual a nature as our souls are ; yet they likewise being maintained and redeemed too by Almighty God, we ought to give thanks in every thing relating to them also. It is true, our bodies are made of very coarse materials, of nothing but a little dust and earth ; yet they are so wisely contrived, so curiously composed, so neatly, so artificially, so admirably ordered and put together, that we cannot but acknowledge and admire the wisdom and power of him that made them, in every part of them ; as David did, saying, *I will praise thee, O Lord, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made ; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth,* Psal. cxxxix. 14, 15. And considering the frailty and weakness of our mortal bodies, how prone they are to moulder away into their first principles, we cannot but acknowledge the goodness and mercy of God in their daily preservation, as well as his wisdom and power in their contexture and composition ; for we see by daily experience, how little a thing is apt to disorder and put them out of tune ; yet nevertheless we see too, how long we live in health, and strength,

and vigour, both of body and mind ; how the organs of our senses, as well as other members, are kept in tune for many years together, yea, and the very animal spirits too, which the soul makes use of in its operations. But who can see this, and not cry out with the aforesaid prophet, *This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?* Psal. cxviii. 23. It was he that made these earthly tabernacles at first, and it is he that upholds them every moment ; insomuch that should he but once let go his hold of them, they would immediately drop down to nothing : and therefore to him must the thanks and praise be given, for every moment that we either live, or move, or have any being at all.

And what if our bodies be sometimes sick and out of tune ? what a miracle of mercy is it that they are not always so, as God might justly make them ? and yet, in that very sickness, we have cause to give thanks, that we are still in the body, though it be in pain, or sick, and that that very pain or sickness of our bodies is designed by God for the health and welfare of our souls, and that he is pleased by it to put us in mind of our latter end, and to prepare us for it by *mortifying our flesh with its affections and lusts*, which otherwise would destroy our souls. In which respects I verily believe that sickness is a greater blessing than health itself to many persons, yea to all sincere Christians that make that use of it which God intends, and therefore cannot but give him thanks for it.

But what if this sickness ends in death ? must we in that also give thanks ? yes surely : for that also is no more than the death of the body, and so carries us only out of this vain, and troublesome, and sinful world, into that, where all that sleep in the Lord Jesus, enjoy perpetual rest and felicity. And they who desire to be there, cannot surely but thank God for all the methods that he is pleased to use, whereby to bring them thither ; and particularly for taking them out of the body in order to it.

And then, as for our outward estate and condition in this world, it cannot be denied but that we are continually subject to changes and alterations in it: but it cannot also but be acknowledged, that we have as much cause to thank God for every one, as for any of them. Are you rich and prosperous in the world? How came ye to be so? Was it by your own wisdom and cunning, by your own care and industry? No surely: there are many as wise, and cunning, and careful, and industrious as you can be, and yet live in penury and want. But whom then must you thank for your wealth and riches? None certainly but God: *it is his blessing that maketh rich*, Prov. x. 22. *It is he alone that giveth thee power to get wealth*, Deut. viii. 18. So that you are beholden to him for every foot of land, for every farthing of money, for every crumb of bread, for every drop of drink, for every rag of clothes you have in the world; and therefore must needs be bound to thank him for every thing you have: yea, and for what you have not too: for what he gives you, he knows will be really good for you, if you do but make a good use of it; but what he thinks good not to give you, you may be confident it would do you no good if you had it, but rather much hurt; and by consequence your not having it is a greater mercy than if you had it: so that you have the same cause to give thanks for every thing you have not, as for every thing you have.

And herein, I dare say, I speak no more than what many here present have found true by their own experience; who having earnestly desired some temporal blessing, as they thought it to be, and being disappointed of it, have afterwards plainly seen that it was much better for them not to have it than to have it; and therefore that their disappointment was a far greater mercy than the thing itself would have been: and, by consequence, that they have more cause to thank God for withholding it from them, than if he had bestowed it upon them. This we ourselves may easily observe in

many things ; from whence we may conclude it holds good in all, though we do not always take notice of it : but though we cannot see the event of things, what will, or what will not do us good, God doth ; and if we leave it to him, we may rest satisfied in our minds, that he will take care that we shall have nothing that may do us hurt, as well as all things that are good for us ; and so in every thing give thanks unto him.

And what if God should see good not only to withhold what we desire, but also to withdraw something from us, which he hath already bestowed upon us ? That I confess at first sight may seem to us very severe and hard : but if God sees good to do it, we may be sure it is so ; and therefore must give him thanks, not only that we once had it, and that we had it so long, but likewise that we had it no longer ; that he continued it to us so long as he saw it might be good for us, and took it from us so soon as he saw it might do us hurt. For this we have the famous example of Job, who was stripped of all his children and his whole estate in one day, and left as bare and naked as he came into the world, and yet was so far from repining at it, that he immediately gave God his humble and hearty thanks for it, saying, *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord*, Job i. 21.

But while we are in this mortal body, we are liable to many other troubles and calamities, besides these above mentioned. It is true we are so ; but it is as true also, that no man ever suffered so much in this world, as God might justly have laid upon him : but whatsoever happens, we may still say with Ezra, that *God hath punished us less than our iniquities deserve*, Ezra ix. 13. So that in the midst of all the judgments we meet with here below, there is some mercy for which we ought to give thanks, if it was for nothing else, but that the judgment is no greater than it is, but far less than it

might have been : but besides that, the very punishment itself is a token of God's love : for *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons*, Heb. xii. 6, 7 And certainly that is no small favour, that Almighty God himself should treat us like his own children. But why doth he ever chasten us ? Not for his own pleasure, but for our profit, *that we might be partakers of his holiness*, ver. 10. of his holiness ; the greatest blessing that we can ever have ; yet that is designed for us in every chastisement that God is pleased to lay upon us. He intends not only to do us good, but to make us good by it ; to take off our minds from sin and the world, and to incline them wholly to him, and his wise and righteous laws ; which David found to be the happy effect of all his troubles, saying, *Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I have kept thy word*, Psal. cxix. 67. and, *Therefore it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes*, ver. 71. From whence it comes to pass, that, as St. Paul assures us, *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. iv. 17. And this hath been the constant experience of all that truly love and fear God in all ages. They have still reaped more spiritual profit and advantage from their troubles, than from all the outward comforts they ever enjoyed. And although we cannot always see it so plainly here, yet when we come into the other world, where God will discover to us the reasons of all his dealings with us here below, we shall then perfectly behold and admire God's goodness and mercy to us in every thing that befel us : we shall then clearly see, that the very troubles and crosses we have met with were not only profitable, but so necessary for us, that but for them we had been ruined and undone for ever, and therefore would not have been without any one of them for all this world. In short, we shall then see the

truth of the apostle's assertion, that *all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*, Rom. viii. 28. and by consequence, that no one thing ever happened to us, but what we have cause to give thanks for ; and that too in our spiritual estate, as well as temporal. For whilst we are in the body, we are subject not only to the troubles of the world, but likewise to temptations from the devil. But whatsoever may be his end in tempting, be sure God's end in suffering it is only for our good ; to make us more humble and vile in our own eyes, more sober and vigilant against our ghostly enemies, more fervent and sincere in our prayers to God, more frequent and devout in our addresses to Christ at his holy table, and more constant in the exercise of all such graces and virtues as are necessary in that case ; as of meekness, and patience, and courage, and faith, and trust on the promises of God, and the merits and intercession of our blessed Saviour, to assist and enable us not only to withstand but conquer the temptation, and grow better by it : by which means we have cause to give thanks, even in every temptation that assaults us : how much more, for every one of these spiritual mercies that God is pleased to vouchsafe unto us, for every motion of his holy Spirit, for every check of our own consciences, for every reproof of his holy word, for every grace we have, for every good work we do, and for every bad one that we do not, for every truth that he hath revealed to us, for every promise he made us, for every command that he hath laid upon us, for every advice and counsel that he hath given us to leave our sins, and return to him, to be holy and righteous in all our ways, and *in every thing to give thanks to him* ; as he doth this day ?

For this is that which in his name I now advise and beseech you all to do, that you would *not be only hearers, but doers of the word*. Ye have heard that it is your duty to give thanks in every thing, and what cause you

have to do it; go ye therefore and do likewise. *In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* It is God's will, and therefore your duty. It is God's will in Christ Jesus concerning you, and therefore it must needs be your interest too. For now that Christ hath suffered all the punishments which were due to you, ye may be sure that nothing is either laid upon you, or required of you by God, but what is really for your good and profit: as this doubtless is as much, if not more than any other duty whatsoever: for to give thanks in every thing, is the way never to be discomposed or disturbed at any thing; but always cheerful and pleasant, rejoicing in the goodness and love of God, manifested in every thing that happens to us. This is the way to turn all our seeming troubles into real mercies, and to make every thing that God either doth or gives to us, to be good for us: for, as the apostle says, *Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving,* 1 Tim. iv. 4. So that by this means no evil can ever befall us; for whatsoever befalls us, shall do us good. Yea, this is the way to antedate the joys of the other world; to live heaven upon earth; to be fellow-commoners with the glorified saints and angels, even whilst we are in the body: for though we know but little else of what they do or have above, yet this we know, that they are always giving praise and thanks to God, and that it is their pleasure and delight to do it. For thus St. John beheld them employing and recreating themselves in singing hallelujahs to the most high God, and crying out, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honour, and glory, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created,* Rev. iv. 11. And again, *Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen,* chap. vii. 12. This is their work, and this is their pleasure too. And so far as we sincerely

praise and thank God, so far we do as they do, and enjoy what they enjoy, before we come to them ; and so shall be duly prepared and qualified to be admitted into their blessed society, and to join with them in adoring and magnifying the almighty Creator, and most gracious Governor of the world, and in giving thanks to him for every thing he ever did, either to us, or for us, through his only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ : *to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, and praise, and thanks, for ever and ever.*

S E R M O N C V I I I .

ALL THINGS TO BE DONE TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

I C O R . x . 31 .

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

AS ever we desire to live well and do good in the world, we must take special care to direct our lives and actions all to a right and good end. For though a good end can never make a bad action good, yet a bad end always makes an action bad : be the matter of it never so plainly commanded by God, and the manner of our doing it never so agreeable to his revealed will ; yet, after all, the action itself cannot be good, unless the end for which we do it be so. For it will fail in one of the most necessary causes and qualifications required to it : and that is one great reason that there is so little good ever done in the world, because men seldom make that which is truly good the end of any thing, much less of all things they do. All men, as they are understanding and free agents, propound some end or other to themselves in all their actions ; and it is always something which they apprehend to be good and convenient for them, and think they may be better and happier with it than without it, otherwise they would not desire it, nor do any thing for it. But most men, being led more by fancy, than by reason or religion, are apt to mistake that for good which is not so ; and through that mistake

spoil all their actions, by directing that to a wrong end.

This is the case of all who labour only to get a livelihood in the world ; of all who design nothing but to enrich themselves ; of all who lay out themselves wholly to advance their families ; of all who aim no higher than at sensual delights and pleasures ; of all who aspire at the imaginary honour and grandeur of this world ; of all who court the multitude, and strive above all things to be thought wise, or great, or good, or ingenious, or learned, or valiant, or any thing more than ordinary among men : this indeed is the case of all that make any thing in this world the end of their living and labours in it. Their labours are all lost, they live to no purpose, for they never do any one good work ; those things they aim at in all their actions having nothing of real worth and goodness in them ; nothing of truth or certainty ; nothing of happiness or satisfaction to the mind ; nothing but what is below and inferior to them as men ; nothing that can either make them, or do them good, or contribute any thing towards it.

Ye cannot but all acknowledge the condition of such men to be very sad and deplorable : for as they never do any good in this world, they can never receive any in the next ; but as they spend their time in doing ill, they must spend eternity in suffering for it. And yet this is the case of most men in the world, and I fear of most here present. Neither is there any way whereby it is possible for any of us to avoid it, without turning our eyes for the future to their proper object, and making that the great end and design in all our actions which God himself hath prescribed to us. What that is, we need not go far to seek, having it here under his own hand, and delivered to us by his apostle, saying, *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* From whence it is evident at first sight, that it is the will and pleasure of him that made us, that his glory be the end not only of the great-

est, but of the least, not only of some, but of all the actions of our whole life. So that whatsoever is not done to this end, is not done according to the will of God, and therefore can never be good and acceptable in his sight.

This therefore being a thing that is not only very good in itself, but that without which nothing we do is good, we cannot but look upon ourselves as highly concerned to understand the true nature and grounds of it; for which purpose therefore we shall consider,

I. What we are to understand by *the glory of God*.

II. What it is properly to do any thing for the glory of God.

III. In what sense we ought to do all things for that end.

IV Why we ought to do so.

I. The first question must be first resolved, because the others depend upon that; and it is not so easy a matter to do it as it may seem at first sight. For though the glory of God be often mentioned in Scripture, and we often speak of it in our common discourse, yet it is not so commonly understood. It is the glory of the supreme Being of the world, and therefore so great, so resplendent, so infinite, that we cannot cast our eyes upon it, but they are immediately dazzled; we cannot think of it, but our thoughts are presently confounded: how then can we find words whereby to express and declare it? Howsoever, I shall by his leave and assistance, of whom I speak, offer at something towards it, that we may understand what the Scriptures mean by the glory of God; but lest I should say any thing unbecoming of it, and so disparage rather than explain it, I shall keep as close as I can to God's own word, who best knows his own glory, and has been pleased to give us as much light into it, as he thought good and needful for us, as in other places of Scripture, so especially in that where he condescended so far as to discourse with Moses upon this very subject, *Exod. xxxiii.*

For there we read, that *Moses pitched the tabernacle*

without the camp, and called it, אהל מועד, *The tabernacle of the congregation*; or rather, as the word signifies, *The tabernacle of meeting*, where God would meet his people, and be found of those *who sought him*, ver. 7 And accordingly when Moses entered into the tabernacle, *the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses*, ver. 9. We often find in Scripture, God's special presence signified by a cloud hovering over the place where he was pleased to exhibit it. And it is sometimes said, that *the glory of the Lord appeared in it*, or with it, as Exod. xvi. 10. and xl. 34, 35. 1 Kings viii. 10. *like a devouring fire*, Exod. xxiv. 17 or an extraordinary brightness and light shining in or near the cloud. As at our Saviour's birth it is said, *The glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds*, Luke ii. 9. But at this time Moses saw no such light or glory appearing in the cloud. He only saw a cloud, and heard a voice coming out of it, but did not see him that spoke it; and therefore desired, and made it his humble request, that he might see his glory, and his way, so that he might know him, saying, *Now therefore I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me thy way, that I may know thee*, ver. 13. He did not ask to see God himself, but his way; that is, his way or manner of working and manifesting himself in the world. So the Rabbins say, that by the *ways of God* are understood, מדות, his properties or perfections, which he exerteth in the government of the world. And so doth David himself, where he saith, *The Lord made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel*, Psalm ciii. 7

After this, Moses desires the same thing again in other words, saying to God, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory*, ver. 18. To which God answered, *I will make my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee*, ver. 19. This was a full answer to Moses's request; but, lest Moses should mis-

take his meaning, he adds, *Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live*, ver. 20. As if he had said, If by my glory thou meanest my face, my very essence or nature, that cannot be seen by any mortal; but I will shew thee as much of my glory as mortals are capable of seeing, by causing my goodness to pass, and proclaiming my name before thee. For which purpose, saith he, *thou shalt stand upon this rock, and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by thee, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by. And I will take away my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen*, ver. 21, 22, 23. Where, as by his *face* we are to understand his essential glory, or his divine itself, wherein all his perfections centre, or rather are all but one and the same perfection; so by his *back parts* we may understand the emanations of his said essential glory, or the manifestations it maketh of itself in the exercise of its divine perfections in the government of the world, and particularly in respect to mankind; which last shew forth the glory of God *a posteriori*, by its effects and consequents, although *a priori* we can see nothing of it. As we can neither see nor know any thing of the sun, what it is in itself, but we behold its glory in its light and heat, and many wonderful effects which it produceth upon the earth.

That this is the proper meaning of the promise which God here made to Moses, is evident from his manner of fulfilling it. God had promised him to make all his *goodness and his glory pass before him*, and to *shew him his back parts*. Now in the next chapter, where this promise is fulfilled, it is written, *And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty*, (or, as

the words may be rendered, *that he will not utterly destroy,)* *visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children; unto the third and to the fourth generation,* Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Here the Jews reckon up thirteen properties of God, whereof only one is vindictive, and that too is the last. *These, be sure, are the ways of God,* as David himself observes, Psalm ciii. 7, 8. and cxlv. 6, 7, 8. These are those divine perfections which he displays, and manifesteth in the world, and especially towards mankind; and that therefore is properly called the glory of God, which shines forth in the manifestation of these perfections. As where our Saviour said to Martha, *Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?* John xi. 40. that is, his infinite power, and goodness, and mercy, manifested in raising her dead brother to life. Hence the seraphims cried one to another, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory,* Isa. vi. 3. that is, of his divine properties exerted and manifested in all his works. This is properly the glory of God, and that so great, so infinitely great, that although it shine continually about us, so that unless we shut our eyes, we cannot but see it as clearly as we do the light of the sun at noon-day, yet we are not able to comprehend it, but must cry out with the apostle, where, speaking of God's mercy, he saith, *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever,* Rom. xi. 33, 36.

But being got upon the place where God was pleased to proclaim his name, and to make his glory and goodness pass before Moses, I cannot leave it, till I have farther observed, that although there be several other names and properties of God commonly attributed to him in his holy word, besides those which are there specified and particularly mentioned, yet they are all included or

implied in one or other of them. His great essential name, *Jehovah, the Lord*, is twice used, once singly, or by itself, and again with, *לַא, God, the Lord, the Lord God*. The first, I humbly conceive, signifies what he is in himself, without respect to his creatures; as his existence in and of himself, his simplicity, his immensity, his omnipresence, his omniscience, his immutability, his eternity, and many such perfections, which we are not able to comprehend, are all contained in his name *Jehovah*, signifying being, or essence itself: but where it is used with the word *God*, it seems to denote all those perfections, which he manifesteth in the creation and government of the world, and all things in it, as his wisdom, his omnipotence, his goodness, his all-sufficiency, his authority and supreme dominion, which he exerciseth in and over all and every creature that is. And so *the Lord God* is the same; as if he had said, The Lord, the almighty, all-wise, all-good Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things: this he speaks of himself, with reference to the whole creation. But the rest of the properties here mentioned, as his mercy, his grace, his long-suffering, his abundance in goodness, or bounty, and truth, his keeping mercy for thousands, his forgiving iniquities, transgression, and sin, &c. have all respect to mankind in a particular manner. And by the last I named, his *forgiving*, or, as the word signifies, *his taking away iniquity, transgression, and sin*, he plainly shews his special love to them, in sending his Son, *the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world*.

These are those divine perfections wherein the glory of God appeareth especially to us, and wherein he is so transcendently, so infinitely glorious, that no man can think of them as he ought, but he must needs admire and adore him. As Moses did, who had no sooner heard them proclaimed, but he *made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped*, *Exod. xxxiv. 8*. And though we never heard them proclaimed as he did, yet we see them continually shining forth to-

wards ourselves and in all things else : as David saith, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work*, Psalm xix. 1 because his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, appear so clearly in them. And hence it is, that when we acknowledge any of his divine perfections, and testify the same either by words or deeds, we are said to *glorify him*. As when Christ had raised a dead man to life at Nain, it is said, that *the people glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God hath visited his people*, Luke vii. 15. They acknowledged God's truth, his goodness and mercy, in visiting his people, and raising up a great prophet among them ; and this is called their glorifying him. And therefore to glorify God, is opposed to speaking ill of him : *on their part he is evil spoken of, on your part he is glorified*, 1 Pet. iv. 14. And wheresoever God is said to be glorified, as he often is in the holy Scriptures, this was the way whereby it was done : neither is there any other way whereby it is possible for us to glorify so glorious a Being as he is, but only by acknowledging and admiring his glory ; and therefore St. Paul saith, that *he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe*, 2 Thess. i. 10. that is, he shall be glorified, by being admired in them for the infinite goodness that he hath manifested to them ; I say, his goodness, because that implies all the perfections which he exerteth in them, and so is the same with his glory ; as appears from his own words to Moses before quoted. For having first said, *I will make all my goodness pass before thee*, Exod. xxxiii. 19. he afterwards saith, *when my glory passeth by*, ver. 22. whereby he gives us to understand, that his glory is nothing else but his goodness shining forth in all his works ; and by consequence that his goodness in this place doth not signify any one, but all his perfections manifested in the world ; and the more they are manifest, the more he is glorified. And therefore our blessed Saviour, in his prayer to his Fa-

ther, having first said, *I have glorified thee on the earth*, he after shews how he did it, saying, *I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world*, John xvii. 4, 6. And thus it is that we must glorify God, if we ever do it at all, even by manifesting his name, that is, himself, or, which is the same, his perfections in the world; for herein it is that his glory properly consisteth. And whensoever we speak of the glory of God, we mean nothing else but these his divine properties, as displayed and manifested in the world, which are therefore called *his glory*, Eph. iii. 16. I have insisted the longer upon this, because it will help us to understand the next question aright, even what it is properly to do any thing *to the glory of God*: for seeing that *the glory of God* is nothing else but the manifestation of him, and his perfections in the world, hence it necessarily follows, that he who doth any thing for that end and purpose, that God and his perfections may be better manifested in the world, may be truly said to do it *for the glory of God*. Although God, as the Psalmist saith, *he good to all, and his mercy is over all his works*, so that all reasonable creatures, whose hearts are pure and holy, cannot but see him in every thing that is; yet mankind being corrupted and defiled with sin, are apt to live as without God in the world, taking no more notice of him than a blind man doth of the sun, which he cannot see though it shine never so clearly. Now when a man doth any thing whereby the goodness, the wisdom, the power, the mercy, or any of the properties of the most high God, is made more manifest and evident in the eyes of men, than otherwise it would be, so that they may see and admire him, such a one glorifies God; and if he doth it with that intention and design, and no other, then he properly doth it *for the glory of God*.

That this is the true and genuine sense of the phrase, as it is used in my text, appears from the context itself; for the apostle is here speaking of eating such things

as are offered in sacrifice to idols, and saith, that *it is not unlawful to eat of them*, but only in the case of scandal and offence which may be taken at it: as if a Christian be invited to eat with unbelievers, who sometimes had such meat at their tables as had been offered at an idol altar; the Christian might lawfully go thither: but if any one should say to him, This is offered in sacrifice to such or such an idol, as suppose to Jupiter, Diana, Ceres, &c. in that case the Christian ought not to eat of it, for his sake who shewed it: for in that he told him, that it was offered to such an idol, he thereby shewed, that he thought if the Christian really believed what he professed, he would not eat of it; that being accounted among the heathen, as an acknowledging the idol to be God, and a considerable honour done to it, as such. In which case therefore the Christian ought not to eat of it, lest he should seem to acknowledge any other God but the Creator of the world, and so give occasion to the unbelievers to think, that for all his professing to worship none but him, the true God, yet he is not so fully persuaded of it, but that he can join with them in doing honour to other gods besides him; at least, when he can thereby gratify his palate, and the company he is in: from whence the unbelievers might take occasion to think better of their idols, and worse of the true God, whom the Christians profess to worship, Which would be a great dishonour to him, by encouraging others to continue in the worship of false gods, and so hindering them from giving that honour to the true God, which is due unto him. In this case therefore the apostle would not have Christians eat of any thing that is offered to idols. And then, having proved that this doth not infringe their Christian liberty, but that they may lawfully eat of any thing without scruple, where they can do it without offence, he lays down this as a general rule, to be observed upon all occasions, *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* And then he adds, *Give none*

*offence, neither to the Jews, nor the Gentiles, nor to the church of God; that is, do nothing whereby others may be offended at your religion, or from whence they may take occasion to think or speak evil of the God you worship; but rather carry yourselves so among all you converse with, that they may see and acknowledge his majesty and dominion over the world: as in this case; if upon notice given you, that such a thing is offered to an idol, you refuse to partake of it; both he that told you of it, and others, will thereby clearly see, that you are fully persuaded in your conscience, that the God you worship is the only true God; and that he is so great, so glorious, so mighty, and so righteous a Being, that ye dare not do any thing whereby you may seem to own any other god, and so dishonour and displease him; which may be a means of putting others also upon thinking as highly and honourably of him as you do, and so may be persuaded to serve and worship him as they ought. This is, in short, the apostle's scope and design in this place: from whence it plainly appears, that where he saith, *Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*, his meaning is, that all men, especially Christians, should make this the great end of all their actions, that Almighty God may be better known, acknowledged, admired, and honoured in the world: and therefore this must needs be the proper meaning of doing any thing to the glory of God.*

But lest this should not be so well understood by all, as I could wish it was, I shall endeavour to explain it by some known instances. When Abraham had received the promise from God, that *in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed*; although, his age and circumstances considered, the thing might seem impossible to be done, yet, as the apostle saith, *he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also*

to perform, Rom. iv. 20, 21 By this means he gave glory to God, even by being strong in faith, and fully persuaded of his truth and power to perform what he had promised, how impossible soever it might seem to be. So here, he that doth any thing whereby to demonstrate to the world that he is fully persuaded of God's wisdom, goodness, truth, power, or the like, he doth it to the glory of God, because God by that means may be better known and admired in the world.

Hence it is that our Saviour calls his disciples *the light of the world*, Matt. v. 14. because by them men may see the goodness of God, as they see his works by the light of the sun. And therefore he adds, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*, ver. 16. Though he would not have them do good works, therefore, only that men may see them, yet he would have them do them so that men may see them, and glorify God, by acknowledging his grace and goodness in them. And this is properly their doing them *to the glory of God*; which plainly appears in every good work a man doth; because he thereby sets forth God's authority over the world, his goodness in what he hath commanded, and his grace, and mercy, and power, in enabling men to act accordingly. And therefore our Lord elsewhere also saith to his disciples, *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit*, John xv. 8. And St. Paul prays that the Philippians *might be filled with the fruits of righteousness, unto the praise and glory of God*, Phil. i. 11. And when our Lord hath told St. Peter, that *when he was old, he should stretch forth his hands, and another should gird him, and carry him whither he would not*; St. John saith, that he spake this, *signifying by what death he should glorify God*, John xxi. 19. because his laying down his life, as he afterwards did, upon a cross, for Christ's sake, was as great a demonstration as he could give, of his being fully persuaded of God's truth and goodness

revealed in the Gospel. By this the apostle saith he should *glorify God*, or this he should do to the glory of God. From all which it is evident, that the doing of a thing to the glory of God, is the same with doing it therefore that God may be glorified: that is, as I have shewn, that these divine perfections, which he exerteth in the world, may be seen, admired, and praised as they ought.

This the apostle saith should be the end of all our actions: *Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* He instanceth particularly in eating and drinking, because, as I observed, he is here speaking of eating things offered in sacrifice to an idol. But lest we should think that he intended it only for that case, he makes it a general rule to be observed in all and every action of our life, that *whensoever we eat or drink*, upon any other occasion as well as that, and *whatsoever* else we *do*, we still must do it for this end, even for *the glory of God*. But then the next question is, in what sense we ought to do all things for this end, that God may be thus glorified, and so the glory of God; which may be justly made a question; for if we should understand it in the strictest sense, as if a man was bound in every particular action of his life, to be still thinking and aiming at the glory of God, his thoughts would be so continually taken up with the end, that he would not have time enough to employ about the means of effecting it, and so fail in the manner of doing his duty, by being too intent upon the end for which he doth it. And besides, there are many lawful and necessary things to be done in a man's life, which he may not at first sight perceive how they tend to the glory of God, although they really do so: and therefore should a man do nothing before he is sure it will conduce to that end, he will be often forced to neglect or omit many necessary duties upon a groundless fear, that they will not be for the glory of God; whereby he would be

involved in all such difficulties, as would make his life both uncomfortable to himself, and useless to the world. These and many such inconveniences would follow, upon our taking this rule in so strict a sense. But how then is it to be understood ?

First, it is to be so understood, that we ought always to be very tender of the glory of God, so as never to do any thing, nor suffer any thing to be done, if we can help it, which may tend to his dishonour, by giving others occasion to think or speak evil of him, or of that religion and worship which we profess to perform out of duty to him. That the words are to be understood at least in this sense, is plain from what I discoursed before, concerning the occasion of them in the context. And that it is as plain, that this is indispensably required of us, from the very nature of true religion which we all profess, and from the constant practice of those who have sincerely professed it, I shall instance only in two or three.

When God had threatened to destroy the children of Israel for their rebellion against him, Moses was so concerned for the glory of God, that he earnestly besought him not to do it only upon that account ; for, saith he, *If thou shalt kill this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness*, Numb. xiv. 15, 16. and Deut. ix. 28. He feared it would be a dishonour to God, and therefore did all he could to prevent it. Yea, so zealous was he for the glory of God, that at another time he chose, he desired, that his own name should be blotted out of the book of life, rather than God's name should be dishonoured : *And now*, saith he, *if thou wilt forgive their sin ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written*, Exod. xxxii. 32. which was certainly the highest

expression that could be of his great zeal for the glory of God, and of his fear lest any thing should be done which might reflect upon his power and goodness.

The same may be said of Joshua : when the children of Israel were smitten before the men of Ai, *Joshua rent his clothes, and prostrated himself before the Lord, saying, O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies ? For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land, shall hear of it, and shall environ us round about, and cut off our name from the earth ; and what wilt thou do unto thy great name ?* Josh. vii. 8, 9. As if he had said, Thou hast promised to give us this land ; and if, instead of getting it, we be destroyed in it, what will the people say ? How will they blaspheme thy name, as being unfaithful to thy promise, or unable to perform it ? This was that which he was most troubled at, as we should all be at every thing that may give *occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*, (as Nathan said to David, 2 Sam. xii. 14.) Be sure St. Paul was so : for seeing many who professed themselves to be Christians, walking so as to be a scandal and reproach to Christ and his religion, it cut him to the heart, and drew tears from his eyes : *Many, saith he, walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things*, Phil. iii. 18, 19. But what would St. Paul have said, if he had lived in this age, when there are so many millions who profess the faith of Christ, and yet so few, so very few, but who dishonour his sacred name, *crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame*, by their lewd and wicked lives ? This would have gone near to have broke his heart ; and so it must needs do, to all who sincerely love God and Christ above all things, as he did, and all true Christians still do. And if we would manifest ourselves to be such, we must always have

the same zeal for God and our blessed Saviour, so as to do all we can in our several places, that his holy name may not be profaned and dishonoured by others ; especially, we must take care that we never do it ourselves : and for that purpose, whensoever we meet with any thing ; as we often do, wherein the honour of God is concerned, we must do all we can for it ; but nothing against it, though we were sure to gain the whole world by it. As we see in the holy martyrs, who rather than they would sacrifice, or burn incense to an idol, and so dishonour the true God, by seeming to own any other, they chose to part with all they had in the world, and with their lives too. And though we should never be so happy as to be put upon such a trial, yet howsoever we must shew our good will and readiness for it, if there be occasion, by preferring the glory of God before our temporal interest, and every thing that is near or dear to us in this world : so that if it comes to that point, that we must either do something which may cast a reflection upon Almighty God and his holy religion, or else suffer some great pain, or shame, or loss to ourselves, we are cheerfully to choose the latter, so as to suffer any thing ourselves, rather than the glory of our great Creator, and most merciful Redeemer, should suffer any thing by us. For this is the lowest sense wherein we are to do all things to the glory of God, even by doing nothing at all against it.

I call this the lowest sense in which these words can be understood ; for they certainly require us to go higher, even so far, as in the next place to make it the main scope and business of our lives to promote the honour and glory of God, according to the several abilities and opportunities which he is pleased to give us for that purpose. And if we do that, whether we always think of it or no, we may be truly said to *do all things to the glory of God*, because all things we do are designed in general for that end : as a covetous man, who makes it his great drift and design, through the whole

course of his life, to get money, although he do not think of it in every particular action, yet he is properly said to do all things for that end, and no other. And it would be a horrid shame, if the men of this world should be more diligent and industrious, in carrying on their little designs of advancing themselves and families in the world, than we are in promoting the great end of our lives, the honour of that almighty Being in whom we live. This therefore is that which we are here commanded, even to propose this to ourselves, as the chief end and design of our lives, that God may be better known, admired, honoured, and glorified in the world, than he would be, if we were not in it; and for that purpose to leave nothing undone, whereby that end may be attained.

As for example: God is glorified by the constant performing our public devotions to him *with reverence and godly fear*; and therefore we ought constantly so to perform them. He is glorified by our praising his holy name, as he himself saith, *Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me*, Psal. 1. 23. and therefore we ought to praise him every day. He is glorified in the holy sacrament, as it is the sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving; and therefore we should take all occasions of receiving it. He is glorified by our submission to the higher powers, in obedience to him who set them over us; and therefore we ought to be subject *not only for wrath, but for conscience sake*. He is glorified by our patient and cheerful bearing whatsoever he sees good to lay upon us; and therefore whatsoever it is, we are to bear it patiently and cheerfully. He is glorified by our believing what he hath said, and trusting on what he hath promised; and therefore whatsoever he hath said or promised, we are to believe and trust on it. He is glorified by our abstaining *from all appearance of evil*; and therefore whatsoever appears to be evil, we must abstain from it. He is glorified by all the good works we do; and therefore we must do all we can. In short,

he is glorified by our living in a constant and sincere obedience to all his laws; and therefore we must constantly and sincerely endeavour to obey them all, through the whole course of our lives: for, as the apostle saith, *by breaking the law we dishonour God*, Rom. ii. 23. so by keeping it, we glorify him, because hereby we demonstrate to the world, that we are fully persuaded that he is our supreme Lord and Governor; and that all the laws that he hath set us are like himself, holy, and wise, and just, and good. And therefore, in order to our doing all things as we ought, *to the glory of God*, it is necessary that we make it the great end we aim at, and design all along in all our thoughts, words, and actions, to approve ourselves to him, by observing his laws to the utmost of our knowledge and power, in the respective places, relations, offices, conditions, and circumstances, wherein he hath set us: according to that excellent rule in St. Peter, which may serve as a commentary upon my text, *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ: to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever*, 1 Pet. iv. 11.

But this is not all neither; for this command, *Do all things to the glory of God*, plainly implies, that we must not only make this the chief end of our actions in general, but we must aim at it as much as we can, in every thing we do, that is of weight and moment: as David *set the Lord always before him*, Psal. xvi. 8. so we ought to have him and his glory always in our eye; and undertake nothing of consequence, but with respect to that end. Much to the same purpose is that of the apostle, where he saith, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*, Col. iii. 17. which command I do not see how it can be observed as it ought, unless we have an eye to Christ in whatsoever

we do, and give thanks, or glorify God the Father by him, for enabling us to do it. So here, where we are commanded by the most high God, our Maker, to *do all things to his glory*, it is plainly his divine will and pleasure, that whatsoever we set about, we should look up to him, and therefore do it, that we may some way or other glorify him by it.

As, if a man goes to church, he must go with a design to glorify God there, and to be instructed, directed, and assisted to do it better afterwards. If a man follows his particular calling, as all ought to do, he must therefore do it, that he and his family may have wherewith to serve and glorify God in their generations. If a man undertake an office, or charge, or trust, he must therefore undertake it, that he may glorify God in the faithful discharge of it. If a man buys, or sells, or makes any contract, or bargain, he should do it so justly and honestly, as to shew he fears God, and so glorify him in the doing of it. If a man sets upon the learning of any art, or trade, or science, or language, he should therefore do it, that he may be better qualified and capacitated to glorify God, than otherwise he would be. If a man erects a school, or hospital, gives an alms to the poor, or exerciseth any sort of charity, he should do it only in obedience to God, and for his glory. If a man be in any company, he should discourse and converse with them so as may most conduce to this end; according to the apostle's rule, *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*, and so glory to God, Eph. iv. 29. The apostle in my text goes much lower, saying, that if a man *eats or drinks, he should do it to the glory of God*; not only by begging his blessing upon it, and returning him thanks for it, but by doing it for that end and purpose, that he may serve and glorify God both in his soul and body, which are his.

Thus I might instance in all the main actions of a

man's life, and shew that they ought to be all directed to this, as their ultimate end ; I say, ultimate, because a man may doubtless propose other ends besides this, to himself, in what he doth ; but they ought to be such as resolve themselves at last into this. As in eating and drinking, a man may aim at the preserving his body in health and vigour ; but so, that he may employ that health and vigour in the service and for the glory of God. In the use of the means of grace, a man may aim at his obtaining the grace of God ; but he should aim at that only, that he may glorify God by it. And in whatsoever a man doth in order to it, he may lawfully aim at his own salvation, and have an eye to the recompence of reward ; but that should be in order to his glorifying God for ever. So that this ought to be the ultimate or last end of all our actions ; in respect of which, all other ends, which we propose to ourselves, should be but as means that tend to it ; otherwise we can never obey this command which our almighty Creator hath here laid upon us by his apostle, saying, *Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

This, I confess, at first sight, may seem a very hard lesson : at least, I fear, it is but seldom practised ; mankind in general looking no farther than to gratify their flesh with the pleasures, their eyes with the riches, or their fancies with the honours, of this world. One or other of these is the only end that most men aim at in every thing they do. But that reasonable creatures, and such too as pretend to be Christians, should make such things as these the end of any, much more of all their actions, is one of the most unaccountable things in nature. There can be no reason assigned for it, except this one, that reasonable creatures themselves will act without reason, and against it too ; suffering their appetites, their passions, or their humours, to overpower their judgments, and put out or stifle that little light that is within them ; so that they can look no farther

than to such things as are present, and lie just before them, even the little inconsiderable trifles of this world, which can never do them any real good, as their own reason, if it was duly consulted, would soon convince them: and so it would too, that there is nothing in this world worth our aiming at, but the glory of God; but that that will answer all the ends we can in reason propose to ourselves in any thing we do, and by consequence ought to be first and chiefly intended; which is the last thing I promised to shew.

And it is a thing that may be easily done. I need not go from my text for it. For we cannot but all acknowledge, that there is all the reason in the world that the will of him that made us, and gives us power to act, should be the rule and standard of all our actions. But here we see, that he hath declared it to be his will, that *whatsoever we do, we should do it to his glory*. And if it be his will, it must needs be our duty; and we are bound always to observe it, as ever we desire that any thing we do should be good and acceptable in his sight.

Although this be reason enough, why we ought to do all things to the glory of God, and we ought to do so only for that reason; yet, to explain and press it a little farther, we may observe, that God being infinitely wise, and good, whatsoever end he proposeth to himself in what he doth; must needs be the wisest and the best that can be; and that we, and all who are capable of it, are bound to imitate him as near as we can; to *be holy, as he is holy*, 1 Pet. i. 15. and to be *followers of God as dear children*, Eph. v. 1 and so to carry on the same designs, and to aim at the same end as he doth, in every thing that we do by him. But whatsoever he doth, he doth it only for his own glory; as the Wise-man saith, *The Lord hath made all things for himself*, Prov. xvi. 4. *For himself*, that is, for the manifestation of himself, his wisdom, his power, his goodness, his mercy, and all his divine perfections, which, as I have shewed, is that which

he himself calls his glory, and which the Scriptures always mean by that word. So that to do all things for himself, is the same as to do all things for his own glory. Thus he himself explains it, saying, *This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise*, Isai. xliii. 21. And in the same chapter again, *I have created him for my glory*, ver. 7. And as it was for this end that he made all things, it is for this end that he governs and orders all things that he hath made. As he said to Pharaoh, *And in very deed, for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth*, Exod. ix. 16. And so in the case of Lazarus, when our Saviour heard that he was sick, he said, *This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby*, John xi. 4. The same may be said of every thing God doth; he doth it for his own glory. Neither can we imagine for what other end he can do any thing, being infinitely happy in himself. And therefore in order to our imitating him, as we are bound, according to our capacities, we must do so too: whatsoever we do, we must do it *to the glory of God*; and so carry on the same design in the world that God himself doth; which must needs be acknowledged to be as much our interest as it is our duty: for we shall hereby *walk*, as Enoch did, *with God*, in his steps, and so continue always in his favour, and under his protection.

And besides, as God made all things else, so he made mankind in general, and us in particular, for himself. He did not make us to rake in kennels, and to scrape together the dust and dirt of the earth; to stand gaping after popular air, nor yet to sit still and do nothing: he did not make us to wallow like swine in the mire, or to gratify our flesh with brutal pleasures: he did not make us for the devil, to be his slaves and vassals; nor for this wicked world, to follow the pomps

and vanities of it ; neither did he make us for ourselves, to humour and please ourselves, or to seek our own honour or applause : but he made us wholly and solely for himself, to serve and glorify him. And unless we do that, we do not answer his end in making us, and so live to no purpose in the world. And whatsoever it is we do, that doth not tend to that end, will turn to no account at all ; it would have been better for the world if it had never been done, and for us if we had never done it. And therefore, as ever we desire not to labour in vain, and to no purpose, or, which is worse, to an ill one, *whatsoever we do, we must do it to the glory of God.*

Especially considering, that as God made us for this end, so it is for this end that he still preserves and supports us in our being : it is for this end he gives us health, and strength, and life, and all things necessary to it : it is for this end he continues our senses and reason to us, and all the powers and faculties of our souls. It is for this end he hath revealed his will and pleasure to us, that we may know how to do it. Yea, it is for this end he redeemed us to himself with the blood of his only-begotten Son ; so that we are none of our own, but are *bought with a price* ; and therefore, as the apostle argues, should *glorify God, both in our body and in our spirit, which are his*, 1 Cor. vi. 20. And if we be wholly his, as we certainly are, then we ought to be wholly employed in his service. But we are capable of serving him no other way, but only by promoting his honour and glory in the world : which therefore we are bound to endeavour in every thing we do ; otherwise he will look upon us as idle and unprofitable servants, and *cast us, as such, into outer darkness* : whereas, if we do all we can to honour him, he himself will honour us. We have his own word for it, saying, *Them that honour me, I will honour*, 1 Sam. ii. 30. and, *If any man serve me, saith Christ, him will my Father honour*, John xii. 26. And what can we desire

more, than to be honoured by God himself? This honour have all the saints ; all who, *whether they eat, or drink, or whatsoever they do, do all to the glory of God.*

What now remains, but that knowing our duty, we should all resolve, by God's assistance, for the future to do it. For which purpose, in every thing we do, especially that is of weight and moment, let us remember the end for which God himself would have us do it, and do it only for that end. Whatsoever we think will tend to his glory, let us set about it with all our might ; but whatsoever may cast any dishonour upon him, let us avoid and shun, although we were sure to get the whole world by it. Every morning let us consider what we can do that day for him who gives us all we have ; and at night, whether we have done it or no. Whatsoever talents God hath put into our hands, let us remember that we are but stewards, not proprietors of them, and therefore improve them only for our Master's use. In short, from this time forward, let this be the great end and design we carry on in the world, even to glorify him that sent us hither, and redeemed us to himself for that very purpose. Let us but do this, and then we may be confident that we shall live under his care and protection, and have his love and favour, his blessing and assistance attending us all our days on earth ; and at length shall get to heaven, where we shall both glorify and enjoy him for ever, through his only Son : to whom, &c.

S E R M O N C I X .

ALL THINGS TO BE DONE IN THE NAME OF CHRIST.

COL. iii. 17.

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ; giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

THERE are three ways whereby we come to the knowledge of things, and are moved to act accordingly ; our senses, our reason, and faith : the first we have as animals, the second as men, the third as Christians. By our senses we perceive only gross and material objects, with their several accidents and qualities, as their colour, their smell, their taste, their sound ; whether they be soft or hard, and the like : these we have in common with other animals, which are affected only with such kind of things, and with them only as they seem, every one to its proper sense, to agree or not to agree with their natural constitution and temper. By reason we can lay many such things together, reflect upon them, gather inferences from them, and improve them to our best advantage, not only as we are single persons, but likewise as we are of societies, and converse together : by it we can abstract our thoughts from matter, and exercise them upon things that have no dependence upon it, such as the truth and falsehood of a metaphysical proposition, and the like : by it we can raise up our minds so far above all sensible objects, that we can contemplate upon him who made and governs them, and from thence

can see how much it concerns us to do what we can to please him ; and foresee, that we must one day give an account to him of all our actions, and be happy or miserable in the other world, according as we have or have not pleased him in this.

But this is the farthest that our reason can now carry us : for though we know it to be our interest to please God, and to provide for our future state, yet how to do either to any purpose, we could never know but from God himself ; who hath therefore revealed to us all that is necessary for us to know for such purposes in his holy word. And from hence ariseth the third way of our coming to the knowledge of things, even by faith, or a firm persuasion of the truth and certainty of what God hath revealed to us, upon that account, because he hath revealed it. By which means we do not only know the greatest truths that we are capable of, and such as are most necessary for us to know, but this is the most certain, or rather the only certain knowledge that we have of any thing in the world ; for our senses we know are fallible, and so is our reason too. We find by experience, that they have often deceived us ; but we know that God is infallible ; that he can neither be deceived, nor deceive : and by consequence, what he hath said, we are sure is true, so far as we believe that he said it. But he in his holy word hath told us all that he would have us believe or do, that we may have his favour, and be happy for ever. And therefore if we believe, as we have all the reason in the world to do, that the Scriptures were given by the inspiration of God, and so is his word, we thereby have more certain knowledge of such things, than we can have of any thing else ; although many of them are beyond the reach of our reason, and such as we could never have thought, if they had not been there revealed : as the apostle saith, *By faith we understand, that the worlds were framed by the word of God*, Heb. xi. 3. which otherwise we should never have understood.

The same may be said of many other things, which are purely of divine revelation. By faith we understand, that God made man in his own image, but that he corrupted himself, and fell from the state in which he was made. By faith we understand there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, *the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.* By faith we understand, that *as he was delivered for our offences, so he was raised for our justification.* By faith we understand, that *being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* And, to name no more, by faith we understand what is required on our parts towards our being thus reconciled to God, and so to our obtaining eternal life; what we must do for it, and how we must do it. This Almighty God hath clearly revealed to us in the holy Scriptures, particularly in this chapter, where he requires us, for that end and purpose, *to seek those things that are above, to mortify the deeds of the body, to put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of our mouth; and to put on bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, and above all things charity;* and among other things, he requires, in the verse before my text, *that the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts unto the Lord.* And then he gives us this general rule to be observed in all our actions, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

Where we see it hath pleased the most high God, by his apostle, to acquaint us how he would have us speak as well as act, that we may know how to please him in word as well as deed. And to make us more careful to follow his directions herein, he hath elsewhere told us with his own mouth, that *every idle word that men should speak, they shall give account thereof at the day of judgment.* For by thy words thou shalt be

justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned, Matt. xii. 36, 37 Which I therefore observe, because we are very apt to speak many words, and perhaps write and print them too, without considering the account that we must give to God, or the rules that he hath given to us about them; and particularly that here mentioned, whereby we are required, both in *word* and *deed*, to do *all in the name of the Lord Jesus*. Where our speaking also is called doing; as well it may in a large sense, our uttering words being doing something, as well as any thing else we do.

But to understand this rule aright, it will be necessary to consider what is here meant by *the name of the Lord Jesus*; and then in what sense we ought, both in *word* and *deed*, to do all in his name.

The name of the Lord Jesus is often in our mouths; oftener, I fear, than in our hearts, we being very prone to name his name, without ever thinking of him whose name it is. Whereas, if we did but consider duly what it is that is signified by that name, as we should never think that we could think enough of him, so we would never take his name into our mouths, but we should at the same time lift up our hearts with reverence and thankfulness unto him.

Let us therefore consider, first, who this person is, who is here called *Jesus*. Not a mere man; not an angel, or archangel, or any other creature that God hath made; but his only-begotten Son, *whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they,* Heb. i. 2, 3, 4. *For God hath given him a name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in*

heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, Phil. ii. 9, 10, 11. From whence we may also see, wherefore the apostle in my text calls him the *Lord Jesus*; *every tongue is bound to confess that Jesus is the Lord*; the Lord paramount over the whole creation.

But when was this name *Jesus* given him? It was given him before he was conceived in the womb, by no less a person than the angel Gabriel; who being sent from heaven on purpose, said to the blessed Virgin, *Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name Jesus*, Luke i. 31. Where we see, he commanded her to call him by that name. And that he might be sure to be called by that name, the angel laid the same command upon Joseph also, to whom the blessed Virgin was espoused, saying to him, *She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus*, Matt. i. 21. And then acquainted them likewise with the reason why he should be called by that name, even because *he shall save his people from their sins*. For the word *Jeshua*, or *Jesu*, in the original, signifies a Saviour. But lest any should think, as the Jews did of the Messiah, that he should save his people only from their temporal troubles, the angel saith, that *he shall save them from their sins*; and by consequence from all sorts of punishments due unto them for their sins, so as to make them eternally happy. And for this reason it was that he was called *Jesus*, the Saviour, the only Saviour of mankind. *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*, Acts iv. 12. *but he is able to save them to the utmost who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*, Heb. vii. 25. So that no man ever was, or ever can be saved by any other; but by him, any man may be saved to the utmost, that will come unto God by him.

But that we may better apprehend how well he deserves this great name, and what he hath done to make it good, we must farther observe, that as Almighty God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, made all things by his Word, so he was graciously pleased to save fallen man also by his Word. For God the Son, or *the Word, was made flesh, and dwelt among us*, so as to be both God and man in one person. How this could be, is not for us to enquire ; it is sufficient that God himself hath revealed it to us. Neither can it seem any greater wonder, that the Word should be made flesh, than that all things should be made by the Word of God : no greater, that God should be made in the likeness of men, than that men were made in the likeness of God. Every thing that God doth is wonderful to us, in that it is beyond our understanding and comprehension. But the greatest wonder of all is, that when he, *who, being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God*, had thus *made himself of no reputation, but had taken upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*, that *being found in fashion as a man, he should humble himself* so far as to *become obedient to death, even the death of the cross*, Phil. ii. 6, 7, &c. Yet, to our wonder and amazement, this did the eternal Son of God for us, and for our salvation.

For he having thus taken upon him the nature of man, not of this, or that particular man, but the nature of man in general, and united it to his own person, he died in it upon the cross, and so offered it up as a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. And by this means he became Jesus, our Saviour : for the death which he then suffered, being suffered by the whole nature of man in union with the divine person, was not only equivalent, but infinitely more than the death of all mankind would have been, if every man had died for his own sins. And therefore, by virtue of his said death, he can save any man from his sins, and will do so for *all that repent and believe in him*, so as to restore them to the favour

of God, and bring them at last to his everlasting kingdom.

But for that purpose, as *he was delivered for our offences, he was raised again for our justification, went up to heaven, and is there set at the right hand of God the Father, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And he hath all things put under his feet, and is given to be Head over all things to the church, which is his body*, Ephes. i. 20, &c. He is the Head, not only of his body, the church, but of all things else for the sake of his said body, and all the sound members of it. All things are now entirely under his power, and at his command : and therefore nothing can impede his saving those who believe in him, but rather all things concur and work together for the effecting of it ; and not only all things that God hath made, but God himself also, that made them. For his only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus, being always in our nature at his right hand, he is the Mediator between God and men, continually making intercession with him, by virtue of the sacrifice which he hath offered upon earth for us : by means of which his mediation and intercession for us, Almighty God is gracious and merciful to us, pardons all our sins, and *gives us all things necessary both for life and godliness ; blessing us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that we may partake of that inheritance which he hath purchased for us with his own blood*. So that whatsoever blessing we have, whatsoever we have that is really good for us, we are beholden to the Lord Jesus for it : whose name is so great and powerful in heaven, that not only all the glorious creatures which are there continually reverence and adore him, but God the Father himself always grants whatsoever he wills ; and he, be sure, always wills, that all who believe in him may be where he is, that they may *behold his glory*, and be happy for ever, John xvii. 24.

Such a glorious, such a mighty Prince is the Lord Jesus : *the Prince of the kings of the earth ; who hath made us also kings and priests to God and the Father, Rev. xv. 6. the only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords : by whom kings reign, and princes decree justice : whose dominion is from one sea to the other, and from the flood unto the world's end : the word, the wisdom, the power of God : the Son of the Father : the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world : the Lamb that sitteth upon the throne, at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father ; angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him : for he hath a name given him that is above every name : his name only is excellent, and his praise above heaven and earth : his name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace : holy and reverend is his name : his name is Jesus ; a name, which all the angels and saints in heaven honour, and praise, and glorify ; a name, that all the devils in hell fear and dread ; as the seventy, whom the Lord Jesus sent out to preach the Gospel, found by experience ; for at their return they said to him, Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name, Luke x. 17* From whence it appears, that as he himself cast out devils by his word, so others did by his name, when he was upon earth.

And what mighty works they who believed in him should do by it after his departure hence, he acquainted his apostles immediately before he left them, saying, *And these signs shall follow them that believe : in my name they shall cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them : they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover, Mark xvi. 17, 18.* And so it was. In his name St. Paul cast out the evil spirit that had possessed a damsel ; he only said to the spirit, *I command thee in the name of*

Jesus Christ, to come out of her : and he came out the same hour, Acts xvi. 18. In his name all his disciples spake with new tongues upon the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 4. In his name St. Paul shook off the viper that fastened on his hand, without feeling any harm, Acts xxviii. 5. In his name St. Peter healed the man that had been lame from his mother's womb ; he only said, *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk : and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength,* Acts iii. 6, 7. In his name the same apostle cured Æneas of the palsy ; he only said, *Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole, arise, take up thy bed : and he arose immediately,* Acts ix. 34. There are many such instances of great signs and wonders done by the name of the Lord Jesus. But lest we should think that only such extraordinary things are to be done by it, the apostle in my text commands us to use it even in our ordinary conversation, saying, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

How we may and ought to do so, is the next thing to be considered : and it deserves our most serious consideration ; forasmuch as herein lieth the great art and mystery of doing good, and living as becomes the disciples of the Lord Jesus. For this being expressly commanded, whatsoever we do, unless we do it in his name, we shall fail in one of the main points required to the making it a truly good and Christian act : and therefore all that desire in good earnest *to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called,* must strive, above all things, to learn and practise this noble and divine art of doing all things in the name of him who hath called them, that what they do may be acceptable to God through him.

To put you therefore into the right way of learning this, you must first observe, that when the apostle saith, that ye must *do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,* he means only such things as are commanded, or at least allowed of, by God in his holy word : for what he

hath forbidden ought not to be done at all, much less in the name of Jesus ; for that would make it a double sin, an abuse of his name as well as a breach of his law, and must be accounted for accordingly at the last day. And how great things soever people may do in his name, unless they observe the laws of God in it, they will be never the better, but the worse for it. Hear what he himself saith, *Many*, saith he, *will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name cast out devils ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity*, Matt. vii. 22, 23. Whereby he hath forewarned you, that how much soever ye pretend his name, and whatsoever else ye do by it, unless ye depart from iniquity, and do that which is good and righteous in it, he will never own you for his disciples, but assign you your portion with hypocrites and unbelievers. The first thing therefore to be observed, in order to your doing all things in the name of Jesus, is, that you do only such things as he hath commanded : and if ye do them also therefore only because he hath commanded them, ye may be truly said to do them in his name, in that ye do them in obedience to his command and authority.

But that which is chiefly required to our doing any thing in the name of the Lord Jesus, is a firm belief or faith in his holy name. This he himself intimates, where, speaking of the great things that should be done in his name, he saith, *And these signs shall follow them that believe*, Mark xvi. 17 and so excludes all other. He hath taught us the same thing also by his apostle St. Peter, who, having cured the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ, afterwards explains how it was done, saying, *And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know : yea, the faith that is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all*, Acts iii. 16. From whence it plainly appears, that it was not done by

the bare naming the name of Jesus, but by faith in it ; or rather, which is the same, Jesus Christ himself did it upon the apostle's believing in his name ; for without which it would not have been done : as we see in those *vagabond Jews, exorcists*, who did not believe in him, and yet *took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth.* But the evil spirit answered and said to them, *Jesus I know, and Paul I know ; but who are ye ?* He derided them ; and was so far from going out upon their naming the name of *Jesus*, that *the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped upon them, overcame them, and beat them ; so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded,* Acts xix. 13, 15, 16. Which is, doubtless, left upon record, on purpose that we may see, that notwithstanding the great power and virtue there is in the name of the Lord Jesus, yet nothing can be done by it without believing in it ; but that such as presume to use it without faith, shall smart severely for it.

From hence we may learn, how necessary it is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to our doing any thing that is great by his name, and by consequence any thing that is good. For to do good, is certainly as great a work in the sight of God as any thing we can do ; if not the greatest of all ; not only because of the rarity of it, which makes miracles seem so great to us, but likewise by reason of the extraordinary grace of Christ, as well as power of God, that is requisite to our doing any thing that is good and well-pleasing in his sight. It is indeed a great wonder, that weak and impotent men should cast out devils, cure diseases, and the like, in the name of Jesus : but that corrupt and sinful men should work righteousness by it, such as the most righteous Judge of the world will accept of as such, is the greatest wonder of all. Yet this we may all do in the name of the Lord Jesus, if we do but be-

lieve in him, and exert our faith as we ought, in what we do according to his will.

Which therefore that we may, we must use all possible means to strengthen our faith in him; that we may not only acknowledge, as I suppose we all do, that he is the Saviour of mankind in general, but be fully persuaded in our minds of all things revealed concerning him in his holy word; believing that he died for our sins, as certainly as we ever committed them; that he is now in heaven at the right hand of God, as certainly as that there is a sun in the firmament; and that he is always there interceding for us, as certainly as the sun ever shines upon us. For though we cannot see him there, as St. Stephen did, yet your faith, as it is *the evidence of things not seen*, represents him as clearly to us, as if we saw him with our eyes; and not only his being there, but his appearing now in the presence of God for us, as our Mediator and Advocate, transacting the great work of our salvation, and taking care that we may want nothing that may further it, nor have any thing that may hinder it; but that all things, which happen to us, may work together for the accomplishment of it; and therefore *is able to save to the utmost them who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*, Heb. vii. 25. For having the word of God for this, we have infinitely more ground to believe it, than we have to believe any thing we see or hear; and accordingly ought to live with a constant sense of it upon our minds, and with a full persuasion, that the Lord Jesus, as he is God, is with us where-soever we are upon earth; as he is man, he is always appearing in the presence of God for us in heaven; and as he is both God and man, in one person, he is our almighty Saviour, able to order all things in heaven and earth for our salvation; can do in us and for us whatsoever may conduce to that end, and will accordingly do it, if we do but apply ourselves unto him for it.

But in order to our doing any thing in the name of the Lord Jesus, it is not enough that we have this faith in the habit, but we must exert or put it forth into act ; actually believing and trusting on him to direct and assist us in the doing it : that we, who can do no good thing without him, may be able, as St. Paul was, *to do all things through Christ that strengthens us*, Phil. iv. 13. and particularly that which we now go about ; that his grace may be sufficient for us, and his strength made perfect in our weakness : that his power may rest upon us, and carry us through the whole work. And when it is done, we must likewise actually believe in him, to make up the defects and imperfections of it with his most perfect righteousness and merits ; that although it be not so in itself, yet it may be *acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*, 1 Pet. ii. 5. not expecting that God should accept of it, as from us, or for any thing in itself ; nor doubting but he will accept of what we do, through the mediation of his beloved Son, with *whom he is well pleased*, and in whom he is pleased with what we do sincerely in his name.

But that we may do any thing wholly in his *name*, it is necessary also that we do it to his *glory* : according to the rule that he hath given us by his apostle, *Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*, 1 Cor. x. 31. For what we do to the glory of the Lord Jesus, is done to the glory of Almighty God, the Lord Jesus being himself God Almighty. Neither can we glorify God the Father but by the Son, whom he hath sent into the world on purpose that he may be glorified in him, and *hath exalted him at his own right hand, that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*, Phil. ii. 11. And therefore as what we do in his name must be done for his glory, so whatsoever is done for his glory is done to the glory of God the Father : which is the ultimate end of all his actions, and ought to be so of ours.

He who thus doth any thing in obedience to his command, and in faith on his promises for his assistance in the doing it, and for God's acceptance of it when it is done, and makes his glory the chief end of it ; such a one may be truly said to do that thing in the name of the Lord Jesus, in that it is both begun, continued, and ended in him, to whom be glory and honour for ever.

This will receive great light from the instances which we have in holy Scripture, of such things as are more particularly commanded or affirmed to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus ; as where he himself saith, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*, Matt. xviii. 20. Whereby he hath signified his pleasure that all our religious assemblies should be held in his name ; that we should meet together as his disciples, in obedience to him our Lord and Master, to serve and worship him with reverence and godly fear, and to exercise our faith in him to enable us to perform that and all other duties acceptably to him, and to God the Father by him.

Elsewhere he saith, *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it*, John xiv. 14. Whereby he hath taught us, that as all our devotions, both public and private, are to be performed in his name, so he will take care that we shall have whatsoever good thing we want, if we ask it in his name, for his sake, who hath merited all blessings for us, and by whom alone we can have any ; stedfastly believing that he will intercede, that we may have it : which therefore is expressed also by our *praying in faith, and without doubting*, James i. 6. 1 Tim. ii. 8. So for the sacraments, he ordained and commanded that baptism should be administered in *the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, Matt. xxviii. 19. and therefore some are said *to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*, Acts xix. 5. because it was done according to his institution and command. And in the institution of his last supper, he

said, *This do in remembrance of me*, Luke xxii. 19. that we may always do it in his name, and in memory of the death he suffered for us ; and so exercise our faith in him all along through the whole duty.

By this apostle we are taught *to give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, Eph. v. 20. and in my text, *Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*. From whence we may learn, that giving thanks to God in his name, is the same with doing it by him. It is by him only that we can go to God the Father, John xiv. 6. and it is only by him that we can receive any mercy from him ; and therefore we must give thanks for all things we have to God by him, believing and acknowledging that it is by him only that we receive them ; and then we are said to do it in his name.

To this we may add the censures of the church, which St. Paul speaking of saith, *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto satan, &c.* 1 Cor v. 4, 5. For here we see that excommunication, or the casting a person out of the church, and so delivering him unto satan, is done in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by his authority and power ; which therefore is the most dreadful punishment that can be inflicted upon earth.

Again, St. Peter, speaking of the devil and his temptations, saith, *Whom resist, stedfast in the faith*, 1 Pet. v. 9. implying, that we should resist him by faith in the Lord Jesus, and so in his name, as David went out against the giant *in the name of the Lord of hosts*, 1 Sam. xvii. 45.

I shall only give one instance more : the Lord Jesus said to his disciples, *Whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward*, Mark ix. 41. where he explains what he means

by giving in his name, by therefore giving it, because they belong to him, and so for his sake, out of love and respect to him : and whosoever thus gives any thing in his name, they have his word that they shall be rewarded for it.

From these instances we may see what it is properly to do any thing in the name of the Lord Jesus, and what kind of things ought more particularly to be done in it : and therefore the words of my text are not to be so understood as if we were bound to have respect to Christ in every little indifferent thing that we do in the common affairs of this life, but in such things as are required in order to our salvation by him, or have any relation to them ; such as we call good works. But that all such must be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, is plain, not only in that it is here expressly commanded, but likewise in that we can neither do any thing well, neither can any thing we do be accepted of as good in the sight of God, without believing in him for it, and so doing it in his name.

Wherefore, as ever we desire to do any good in the world, we must be sure to observe this rule : we must look up to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, believing and trusting on him to assist us with his grace in doing it ; and then to perfume it with the incense of his own merits, that God may smell a sweet savour from it, or be well pleased with it : as when we pray to the most high God in public or private, praise his glorious name, or celebrate the memory of the death he suffered for us in the sacrament of the Lord's supper ; when we set ourselves to mortify any sin, or to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil ; when we undertake to convince and convert infidels or heretics, or to reprove and reform the vicious and profane ; when we go about to instruct the ignorant, strengthen the weak, or comfort such as are troubled in mind, body, or estate ; when we devote any part of our estates to the service of God and his church,

or give any thing to the relief of the poor and indigent ; when we speak, or write, or do, or suffer any thing for the defence of the Gospel, and those eternal truths that are revealed in it : these, and such-like, are great works ; but that they may be good too, they must be done in the name of the Lord Jesus ; otherwise, how great soever they may seem to men, they will be of little esteem with God : whereas, if we do them in his name, we shall not only be enabled by him to go through with them, but Almighty God in him will both accept and reward them.

And indeed, this is the top of our holy religion ; the highest pitch of true Christian piety and virtue, that we can arrive at in this life : which therefore we ought to strive all we can to reach, and never leave till we have got to it ; still *pressing towards this mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ our Lord* : that having the said Lord Jesus always in our minds, and doing all things in his name, we may always live, not as the offspring of the first Adam, but as the members of Christ, and in him the children of the most high God, and so be *meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*, through him ; to whom be glory for ever.

S E R M O N C X.

THE MEDITATION OF GOD'S LAW, THE GOOD MAN'S
DELIGHT

PSALM i. 2.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate (or exercise himself) day and night.

IN the Old Testament we find, that in former ages, when people had occasion and desire to know the mind of God in any difficult and doubtful case, they went to the high priest, who asking counsel for them, *after the judgment of Urim before the Lord*, Numb. xxvii. 21. the Lord was pleased to give them such responses or answers, as clearly discovered his will in the case propounded; which were therefore called his oracles: or else, if God had raised up ever a prophet among them, as he usually did in every age, they would go and consult him, or *enquire of the Lord* by him, Jer. xxi. 2. and the prophet, by divine inspiration, would certainly tell them what the mind of the Lord was in the business they went about. Thus *God, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets*, Heb. i. 1. It was God who spake by the prophets, and therefore whatsoever they said as such, was likewise an oracle of God. And therefore St. Paul, speaking of the advantages which the Jews had above

other people, reckons this as the chief, *because unto them were committed the oracles of God*, Rom. iii. 2.

We have no such kind of oracles to consult in these latter days, as they had; neither have we any occasion for them: for now that God hath spoken to us by his Son, and hath caused what he spake by him and his apostles, as well as what he had before spoken by the prophets, to be committed to writing, and faithfully brought down and delivered to us, we may there know the mind of God in every thing that is necessary for us to consult him about, as certainly as if we received it immediately from him by the mouth of a high-priest or a prophet. For all that holy Scripture being given by inspiration of God, it is all but as one continued oracle of God, wherein he hath delivered and declared his divine will and pleasure in all things that are necessary for any man to know. And whatsoever is not there revealed, we may from thence conclude, that it is not necessary for us to know it; but rather that it is the divine will that we should not be inquisitive about it. But as whatsoever is there revealed, is therefore revealed that we might know it; so whatsoever we are really concerned to know, in order to our being happy, is there revealed, so as that we may know the mind of God himself concerning it.

As for example: it highly concerns all men to know wherein true happiness consisteth, or who may be truly said to be a blessed or a happy man. This we can never know from men themselves, for they could never yet agree about it, some accounting one man happy, some another: and most esteem those only happy, who have most of the good things, as they are called, of this life; though they which have them, find, by their own experience, that they are as far from being happy, as they who have them not.

Wherefore, our only way to be fully resolved in this case, is to consult the oracles of God, who made us, and therefore best knows what will make us happy. But

there we find, that he never pronounceth any man happy for any outward enjoyments. He never saith, blessed are the rich ; blessed are they that are advanced to honour and authority over their fellow-creatures ; blessed are they that fare deliciously every day ; blessed are they that live in ease and plenty of all things they can desire in this world : there is nothing like this in all the Bible among the oracles of God, which are there recorded.

But what then saith the answer of God to this great question, Who is the blessed man ? That we have here delivered, not in ambiguous terms, like the heathen oracles, but in words so plain and easy, that any one that reads them, may certainly understand the mind of God in them. For thus saith the Lord, *Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, and that hath not sat in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law will he exercise himself, or meditate, day and night.* Where we see the blessed man described, not by what he hath or hath not in this world, but first by what he doth not, and then by what he doth : he doth not follow the counsel of ungodly men, that would entice him from his obedience to the truth, and laws of God : he doth what he can to keep out of the way that sinners walk in ; and if, through surprise or inadvertency, he happens to be got into it, yet howsoever he doth not stand or continue in it : he never sits or associates himself with scorers, such as make a mock at sin, deride religion, and scorn reproof. These are the obstinate sinners, upon whom the curse of God will certainly fall ; and therefore he who is blessed of God, will avoid such company and acquaintance, as he would do those which he knows to be infected with the plague.

Neither doth he only avoid that which is evil, but he delights in that which is good : for *his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he exercise himself day and night ;* which being the positive description

made by God himself of a blessed man, such as we all desire to be, it will be worth our while to treat more particularly of it, that we may fully understand his divine meaning in it. For which purpose we shall, by his assistance, consider both parts of it ; how a man should delight in the law of God, and how he should exercise himself in that law day and night : and then it will be easy to shew, that he who doth so is certainly a blessed, a happy man.

First therefore, by the law, or, as the original word signifies, the doctrine of the Lord, we are here to understand all that the Lord, the almighty Creator and Governor of all things, hath taught us in his holy word. For although when this oracle was first committed to writing, there were none other extant but only the five books of Moses, and perhaps Joshua and Judges, yet they then contained the whole will of God ; and all that were afterwards added by the prophets and apostles were only for the clearer explication of what was delivered before in them. And in every age, as God was pleased to make clearer and clearer revelations of himself and his holy will to mankind, the books wherein they were contained were still added to those before written, and reckoned part of his law : so that when the whole canon of the Scriptures was completed, as it hath been now for many years, it is all that law or doctrine of the Lord, in which every wise and good man delights, and which he prefers before all the books that were ever written, and all things else that can be desired in this world ; as David did, saying to God, *The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver*, Psal. cxix. 72. *How sweet are thy words unto my taste ? yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth*, ver 103. *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart*, ver. 111. *Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors*, ver. 24. And it is no wonder ; for no man can look into the law of the Lord, or that system of divine revelations

that the Lord God Almighty hath given to the world, but he will every where find something or other that will afford extraordinary delight and pleasure to him. For, first, how are all men naturally delighted in knowledge, especially in the knowledge of great and necessary truths? This is such a pleasure to the minds of men, that he who doth but think that he hath found out something which he did not know before, his imagination is tickled and pleased with it; as they, who give themselves to the study of natural philosophy, find by their own experience: for if they happen to light upon what they imagine to be the cause of such an effect or phenomenon in nature, they find their minds strangely affected with it; though after all the series of secondary causes, and the dependence of one upon another, and all upon the first, is established and managed with such infinite wisdom and power, as far exceeds the reach of human understandings: so that *we hardly guess aright at things that are upon earth*, Wisd. ix. 16. and all our knowledge of them, at the best, is only opinion and conjecture. And yet this very conceit of our knowing them is a pleasure to us; how much more would it be so, if we were sure that our knowledge was right and perfect? but that we can never be of any knowledge but that which we receive from God himself. There is nothing in this world that we know so certainly, as that all our other knowledge is uncertain; for we have no other than what we receive from our senses or reason, or else from the testimony of other men: but we know by our own experience, that all these ways are fallible, and therefore can never be certain that we know any thing aright by them. But we know that God is infallible; what he hath said cannot but be true, just as he said it: and therefore whatsoever we know upon his word, we are sure that we know it aright. And such knowledge must needs exceed all other in pleasure and satisfaction, as much as it doth in truth and certainty.

Neither is the knowledge which we are taught, and so

learn of God, only certain, and the only certain knowledge that we have of any thing ; but it is the knowledge of the greatest and most glorious things in the world, and such as are most necessary for all men to know.

For by the law, or word of God, we know God himself, as far as finite creatures can know an infinite Being. By it we know that he is a spirit, without body, parts, or passions : that he, simply, is Jehovah, being, or essence itself ; that he is of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness ; that the Father, Word, and Holy Ghost, these three are one, all that one Being, Jehovah, the Lord ; that he is every where, all the world over, the same, without any variableness, or shadow of change : this, and whatever else is either necessary or possible for us to know concerning God, is revealed to us by himself in his holy word ; and he that delights not in the law of God upon this account, because he may thereby know him, it is only because he hath not yet learned to know him by it : for if he had, he could not but find himself affected with it, more than with all the pleasures of the world besides ; the knowledge of God being itself the greatest good and happiness that the soul is capable of, insomuch that eternal life itself consisteth in the perfection of it.

By the law of God we know also how the world was made, how it is still upheld in its being, and how all things in it come to be so wisely ordered as we see they are : by it we know how man was formed, how pure and perfect he was at first made, and how he fell into the wretched estate he is now in : by it we know likewise how God was pleased to set up another Adam, or man in general, even Jesus Christ, by whom mankind might be restored to the same estate from which they fell in the first : that *he who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*, 2 Cor. v. 21. that *as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners ; so by the obedience of one, many are made righteous*, Rom. v. 19. that *as in*

*Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, 1 Cor. xv. 22. that he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification, Rom. iv. 25. that he is the only Mediator between God and men, 1 Tim. ii. 5. and is therefore able to save to the utmost them who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them, Heb. vii. 25. These are glorious and comfortable truths indeed, which no man can hear of, and believe, but he must needs rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, 1 Pet. i. 8. And therefore whosoever is so wise as to mind his own good and welfare, cannot but take great delight in the law of the Lord, where these, and many such great truths, are revealed and attested by God himself. Moreover, such a one finds great delight in the word of God, by reason of the laws or statutes which are there recorded; laws enacted by the supreme Lawgiver, the infinite, wise, and gracious Governor of the world; wherein he hath discovered his divine will and pleasure, how all mankind should demean themselves both towards him, and towards one another, while they are upon earth; and what they must do, that they may obtain eternal life in heaven; all which statutes are so wisely composed and fitted to the nature of man, that, as David observed, *they rejoice the heart, they enlighten the eyes*; and are therefore *more to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than the honey, and the honey-comb*, Psal. xix. 8, 10.*

Again, all men naturally delight in history; in reading what was done in former ages: and the older a history is, the more pleasure it commonly affords, provided it appear to be a true relation of what was done in the times it treats of. But the holy Scripture exceeds all other histories in antiquity, as well as in fidelity and truth. Thucydides, one of the most ancient of all the ancient historians, acknowledgeth, that he could find nothing clear in history before the Peloponnesian

war, which happened about the time of Nehemiah: wherefore the last history (as that is) which we have in the Bible, is as old as the oldest that is extant any where else, to which any credit can be given; the profane beginning where the sacred ends: but here we have many things faithfully recorded, that were done one thousand, two thousand, three thousand years before that, yea, from the very creation of the world.

Besides that, the historical part of the holy Scripture exceeds all other histories in the things which are there related. There we read of what Almighty God himself, and what his holy angels did by his command: there we read what punishments he inflicted upon obstinate sinners, and what care he always took of those who served him faithfully: there we read how his faithful people carried themselves in all conditions, and what they did to approve themselves to him, and to keep in his love and favour: there we read how the Son of God came into the world, what miracles he wrought, how he died, and rose again, and went up to heaven, and all to perfect our redemption: there we have also his life described, the only life that ever man lived upon earth without sin, and so the only perfect exemplar and pattern of all true piety and virtue that was ever seen among men. And if all history be a pleasure, what a pleasure is such a history as this to any sober and considering man?

To all which we may add, that no man can have any solid peace, delight, or comfort in his own mind, but what he draws from the law or word of God; forasmuch as it is there only that we find any firm ground whereupon to trust and hope for his grace and favour. For we, who are conscious to ourselves that we have so often offended the Almighty God, how can we expect any mercy at his hands? No way certainly, unless we have his own word and promise for it. But we have no such promise from him, but only in the holy Scrip-

ture. But there he hath promised pardon, and grace, and all good things that can be desired, to those who repent, and believe the Gospel; and hath confirmed the same promises, as he made them in Jesus Christ. And therefore all that are sensible of their sins, and desire mercy, cannot but take great delight in God's holy word, wherein alone he hath been graciously pleased to promise it to them: from all which, we may conclude with the apostle, that *whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope*, Rom. xv. 4.

Seeing therefore the law of God affords so great delight to those who are exercised therein, when once a man hath tasted of it, his own inclinations will lead him to exercise himself as often as he can in it. And therefore the Psalmist here makes this the other part of the character of a blessed man; for having said, that *his delight is in the law of the Lord*, he adds, *and in his law will he exercise himself day and night*; or, as the original word usually signifies, and is therefore rendered in our last translation, he will *meditate* in it: but the sense is the same, for he exerciseth himself in it by meditating upon it; which he therefore doth not only now and then by the by, but very frequently, or, as it is here expressed, *day and night*. This the royal prophet here asserts of every good man; and elsewhere confirms it by his own example and experience, saying, *O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day*, Psal. cxix. 97 and, *mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word*, ver. 148.

But here it will be necessary to enquire how every good man doth, and we ought to exercise ourselves by meditating in the word of God, so as that we may reap the benefit, and enjoy the delights of it: for this is a greater art, and requires more study and application than men are commonly aware of. But we may learn the whole mystery of it from our church, which, in the

Collect for the second Sunday in Advent, directs us to pray to God, *who hath caused all Scriptures to be written for our learning, that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and, comfort of his holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which he hath given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.* For what we here beseech Almighty God to give us grace to do, we must endeavour all we can ourselves to do it by the assistance of his said grace, which he hath promised to all those who ask it faithfully of him. And if we thus hear the holy Scriptures, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, we shall do all that is required to the exercising our thoughts and meditations upon them, so as to receive both profit and pleasure from them.

First therefore, we must hear the word of God ; that is, we must hear it read, declared, or preached by a minister or officer, sent from God himself to do it. That this is the proper meaning of hearing the word, appears from the word itself, where it is said, *How can they hear without a preacher ? And how shall they preach except they be sent ?* Rom. x. 14, 15. From whence it is plain, that in the sense of Scripture, they only are truly said to hear the word, who hear it from such as are sent to preach it to them. If they be not sent by God, they cannot truly preach in his name ; and then people may hear them as much as they please, it all signifies no more, than as if a nation, having some great affair to transact with a foreign prince, should choose one from among themselves to transact it with them, who having no commission from the said prince, as his ambassador, to do it, whatsoever he doth is void, and of no effect : yet this is the case of many in our age, wherein that Scripture is fulfilled which saith, *The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ; but after their own lusts shall they heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears,* 2 Tim.

iv. 3. And what little good people get by such teachers, which they heap to themselves, we are taught by the same Scripture, saying, *Of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,* chap. iii. 6, 7 They are ever hearing and hearing, as if they could never hear enough, and yet after all, can never come to the true knowledge of God, because they hear such only as are of their own choosing, not such as God sends to them : whereas they who attentively hearken to the word of God, as it is delivered and made known to them by his own ambassadors, and accordingly receive it, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God himself ; *it worketh effectually in them that believe,* 1 Thess. ii. 13. This therefore is the first thing required to the exercising ourselves, and meditating aright in the law of God, even by hearing it repeated or explained to us by one of his own officers, sent by him to do it, and so receiving it as from himself.

And as all ought thus to hear the word of God ; so they who can, ought to read it too : I say they who can, for in our age there are many who cannot read ; and in former ages, especially the primitive, there were few who could : and yet by their bare hearing the word read, or repeated to them, they both understood and practised their duty as well, if not much better, than most of them who can read do it now. And I do not doubt, but the solemn reading or declaring the will of God by his own ministers, hath always the same power and efficacy upon the attentive hearers, whether they can or cannot read it themselves : for it is not to the private reading, but to the public reading of it, that the promises are made ; from whence it comes to pass, that we commonly find ourselves more affected with hearing, suppose a chapter, once publicly read, than we are with

reading the same chapter by ourselves many times over. Yet nevertheless they who can read have a great advantage over those who cannot; in that the impressions which are made upon their minds in hearing the word, may be much confirmed and excited in them by their reading it over again. As the Bereans, when they had heard the word from the apostle's mouth, and received it with all readiness of mind, they then *sought the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*, Acts xvii. 11. Their hearts were first opened to receive the word at their hearing of it; and when they afterwards read the Scriptures, and found that what they had heard was the same that was there written, this confirmed them in it. Upon which, as well as upon other accounts, it is necessary that the Scriptures should be translated into the vulgar tongue, that people may read them, and thereby know, whether what they hear be agreeable to what God had there revealed; otherwise they may be led blindfold they know not whither, as they are in all places where they are not permitted to read the word: at least, they can never be sure that they believe and practise according to it. But they must take heed, that they do not *wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction*, as many *unlearned and unstable* people do in our age, as well as in the apostles, 2 Pet. iii. 16. And for that purpose they must read them with all reverence, meekness, and humility of mind, beseeching God to direct and assist them in it, and to *open their eyes, that they may see the wondrous things of his law*, Psal. cxix. 18.

And whatever it is they either hear or read out of God's law, they must be sure to mark it: you must not hear so negligently, or read so cursorily and superficially, as if there was nothing worthy your notice in it; but you must mark or observe every expression, with the same care and diligence, as if you heard God himself speaking from between the cherubim, or upon the mount. For it is he that speaks all along in his holy

word, which being given by his inspiration, is of that infinite extent and fulness, that how oft soever a man reads it over, he may still find something remarkable which escaped him before. This therefore is absolutely necessary to our meditating aright in the law of God, even to mark or take special notice of what he there saith, considering whose word it is, to what end it was spoken, what use is to be made of it, and how necessary it is to be observed.

For which purpose, as we mark, so we must also learn the Scriptures ; we must learn so as to understand them, at least, as much of them as we can : which I therefore add, because there are some things in the other Scriptures, as well as in St. Paul's Epistles, which are *hard to be understood*, 2 Pet. iii. 16. There are some things revealed there, especially concerning Almighty God our Creator and Redeemer, which are above the reach of our finite understandings ; which therefore we are not bound to understand, but only to believe, and to believe them only upon his word, who hath revealed them to us ; and who therefore only revealed them, that we might believe them, though we cannot understand them ; and so build our faith wholly upon his word and testimony, to the honour of his truth and faithfulness. There are other things hard to be understood, only by reason of the weakness and corruption of our minds ; which therefore are more or less understood, according as men are more or less learned in the original languages, and in such arts and sciences as may give any light to them ; or else, are more or less enlightened by that holy Spirit by which the Scriptures were given. And therefore when we meet with any thing which we do not understand, it doth not follow but other people may understand it ; and if none can, it was written only for the exercise of our faith, that we may believe it upon his word *who cannot lie*. Tit. i. 2.

But whatsoever things are hard to be understood in

the holy Scriptures, we may from thence conclude, that it is not generally necessary for all men to understand them : for whatsoever is so, is as plainly there revealed as words can do it. And therefore, without troubling ourselves about other matters, (as we are too apt to do,) we should apply our minds wholly to learn such things as belong to our everlasting peace, what we must believe and what we must do, that we may be saved : all which are so clearly taught in the holy Scriptures, that a man of the meanest parts may learn them as well as the greatest scholar in the world. Thus therefore it is that we ought to exercise ourselves, or meditate, in the law of God, even so as to understand our whole duty to him, and to one another. He that hath learned this, hath learned enough ; and whatsoever it is that a man learns, without this, will signify nothing to him ; neither will it signify any thing for a man to hear, read, mark, and learn the Scriptures, unless he also inwardly digest them, that is, unless he ruminate upon them, and, by a strong and lively faith, fix them upon his mind, so as to turn them into proper nourishment for his soul, that he may thereby grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and accordingly be fruitful in good works ; in all such good works which are the fruit of that holy Spirit by which the Scriptures were given ; such as *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*, Gal. v. 22, 23. This was the great end for which the Scriptures were at first written, and for which we are now to hear, and read, and meditate upon them ; even that we may know the will of God, and do it ; that we may live with a constant sense of what is there written upon our minds, so as firmly to believe the truths, fear the threatenings, trust on the promises, and observe the precepts which are there revealed ; and particularly that wherein this very thing is commanded by God, saying, *This book of the law shall not depart out*

of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night ; that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written : for then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success, Josh. i. 8. Where we see that it is God's express command, that we should every one meditate day and night in his law ; that we are to meditate in it, so as to do what is there written ; and that this is the way to have his blessing, prosperity, and good success : as our Lord hath taught us also with his own mouth, saying, *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them,* John xiii. 17. and, *Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it,* Luke xi. 28. And by his royal prophet in my text, where, describing the man that is truly blessed, he saith, that *his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night,* verse 3. Wherefore, that he who doth this is blessed, we cannot doubt, seeing he who is the fountain of all blessedness hath here pronounced him to be so. And if we had no such oracle for it, yet we could not but conclude, that he who delights in the law of the Lord must needs be a blessed man, for that very reason, because he delights in the law of the Lord : for this shews, that he is regenerate, and born again ; that he is renewed, sanctified, and governed by the holy Spirit of God, in that he delights in the law that was given by his inspiration ; which he could never do, but by the same Spirit by which it was given : and therefore the apostle saith, *I delight in the law of God after the inward man,* Rom. vii. 22. After his inward man, his spiritual part, so far as he was purified and led by the Spirit of God, so far he delighted in the law of God, and no farther ; and by consequence, he that really delights in the law of God is certainly led by his Spirit : but *as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God,* Rom. viii. 14. *And if sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs of Christ,* ver. 17. and

therefore as blessed as it is possible for creatures to be ; all the blessings promised in the Gospel being entailed upon them.

And as delighting in the law of the Lord is a certain sign that the man is blessed, so meditating in his law day and night is the ready way to be blessed for ever : for exercising ourselves continually in meditating upon the word of God, as I have shewn we ought to do, by this means we come to true wisdom, and a right understanding of all things necessary to eternal life. *I have more understanding*, saith David, *than all my teachers ; for thy testimonies are my meditation*, Psal. cxix. 99. By this means we know the *only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent ; which itself is eternal life*, John xvii. 3. We know him as he himself would have us know him, according to the revelations which he hath given us of himself. By this our minds are enlightened, our judgments rightly informed, our faith confirmed, our hearts cleansed, our affections kept in order, and our whole souls sanctified through the truth ; for his *word is truth*, John xvii. 17. By this we are preserved from all damnable errors and heresies ; we are put in mind of our whole duty both to God and man ; we are quickened and stirred up to the performance of it ; we are armed against all temptations ; we are directed which way to take in all straits and difficulties ; we are protected, we are supported, we are comforted in all sorts of trouble and afflictions : in short, by thus hearing, reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting God's holy word, we embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which he hath given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Wherefore, as ever ye desire to be blessed, so as to obtain eternal life, ye must *search the Scriptures*, where alone ye can ever find it, John v. 39. Ye must delight in the law of the Lord, and meditate therein both day and night ; not only a little now and then by the way,

but so constantly, so seriously, so effectually, that ye may believe, and love, and fear, and hope, and think, and speak, and act as ye are there taught: then ye will be blessed indeed, and declared to be so at the last day before all the world by Christ himself, pronouncing that blessed sentence upon you, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, &c.*

S E R M O N C X I.

THE VANITY OF HEARING THE WORD OF GOD,
WITHOUT DOING IT.

JAMES i. 22.

*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,
deceiving your own selves.*

AS it was by his word that God at first created all things out of nothing, so it is by his word that he now createth us again *in Jesus Christ unto good works*; or, as St. James here expresseth it, *he of his own will begets us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures*, ver 18. that we should be new creatures, creatures after his own heart, such as he at first designed us to be; such he now makes or begets us by his word: by his word, as at first spoken and written from him by his prophets and apostles, and still repeated and published out of their writings, by his ministers or ambassadors sent by him for that purpose: by this it is, that he usually opens men's eyes, and turns them from darkness to light, from the power of satan unto God. And therefore one might reasonably expect, that all that hear this word, the word of Almighty God, should all become saints, all pious and righteous persons, all living according to the word they hear. And yet we see the contrary among ourselves. There is no place upon earth where the word of God is more commonly read and preached than it is in this

kingdom, and particularly in this city: and yet there are but few that take care to frame their lives according to it: few, not in themselves; for I doubt not but there are many, absolutely considered, who by the blessing of God are *doers*, as well as *hearers of the word*: but they are but few, in comparison of many, who are only hearers and not doers of it. And so it was in the days of the apostles themselves. Though St. Peter, at one short sermon, *converted three thousand souls*, Acts ii. and all the apostles preached the word so effectually all the world over, that many were thereby prevailed upon, not only to profess, but to practise what they taught; yet there were others who only gave them the hearing, as appears from this caution which St. James here gives them, and which he would never have given, if there had not been some such among them; saying, *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

A necessary caution at all times, especially in our days, when many place a great part, if not the whole of their religion, in hearing; as if they served God only by hearing how to serve him, or did any good only by hearing how to do it. And yet this is the case of too many among us, who never think they can hear too much, or do too little; which is certainly one of the greatest cheats that the devil ever put upon mankind; or rather, that men ever put upon themselves: for this is plain *deceiving their own selves*, as the apostle here assures us.

But that we may understand his meaning aright, we shall first consider what he here means by *the word*, what by *doing*, what by *hearing* of it; and how it comes to pass that there are many *hearers*, who are not *doers* of it: and then it will be easy to shew, that all such *deceive their own selves.*

By *the word* therefore we are to understand that which the *apostles* preached, and which is now contained and delivered to us in the books of the Old and

New Testament ; wherein it hath pleased the most high God to speak his mind, to make known himself and his will to us ; what he would have us to believe ; what he would have us to do ; and what he would have us not to do ; which is called *the word*, by way of eminence, as infinitely exceeding all other words that ever were spoken by men or angels : for this is the word of Almighty God himself, *who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets ; and hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*, Heb. i. 1, 2. It was God himself that spake, and that spake on purpose that we might know his mind, and act accordingly ; and therefore it is not more frequently than properly called, *his word*. And whensoever we hear any part of it repeated to us, we are to look upon it as his word, and accordingly receive it, *not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God*, 1 Thess. ii. 13. still apprehending the almighty Creator of the world as speaking to us his creatures, and telling us what he would have us do.

By doing of the word, we are to understand the framing both of our minds and manners according as the word directs : as we must do what the word bids, and leave undone what it forbids us to do ; so we must fear the threatenings it denounceth, trust in the promises it makes, and believe the truths it reveals to us ; and all for the word's sake, because we have the word of God for them. So that we must order our very thoughts and affections, as well as our words and outward actions, according to the rules which the word sets us, otherwise we cannot be properly said to be *doers of the word*.

As for example : the word saith, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*, Matt. xxii. 37. Now they who hearing this, immediately fix their hearts and affections upon God above all things else, they are *doers of the word*. The word saith, *Whatsoever ye would that men*

should do unto you, do ye even so to them, Matt. vii. 12. Now they who upon hearing this, accordingly always do as they would be done by, they are *doers of the word*. The word saith, that *all who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction*, 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. Now they who, out of an holy fear of this threatening word, strive all they can to know God, and to obey the Gospel, are *doers of the word*. The word saith, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*, Heb. xiii. 5. Wherefore they who in humble confidence of this word, can boldly say with the apostle, *The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*, ver. 6. they are *doers of the word*. The word saith, *I and the Father are one*, John x. 30. now they, who firmly assenting to the truth of this proposition, upon the word of him that spake it, do really believe the Father and the Son to be one Being, one God, they are *doers of the word*. And so all that, hearing any part of God's word read or declared to them, believe and live according to what they hear, they are *doers of the word, and not hearers only*.

And not hearers only; as all they are who do not take care to do it, but only hear the word read or faithfully expounded to them: I say read or faithfully expounded; for ye must not think that hearing of sermons only, is hearing the word: for there may be many things in them contrary to, or at least besides the word; so that you can never be sure, that when ye hear a sermon, you hear the very word of God, any farther than you have firm ground to believe, that he who preacheth it, both rightly understands and faithfully declares the mind of God, as it is contained and revealed in his written word, which we call the *holy Scripture*, which *being given by inspiration of God*, 2 Tim. iii. 16. is therefore properly his word, and nothing else can be truly called so, but as it agrees exactly with that. But when you hear any part of the holy Scripture read, you are

sure that you hear the very word of God ; and when you hear it read in God's house, by one of his own ministers, commissioned and sent by him to read it, you then hear God's word from God himself : it is he that speaks to you by his minister, and unless you frame both your faith and lives according to what you so hear, you are *not doers of the word, but hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

But are there any such among us ; men that hear God's word, and will not do it ? I heartily wish there were not : but the case is too plain to be doubted of. Blessed be God, his word is publicly read in many places of this kingdom every day in the week, in all every Lord's day, and often expounded too ; so that all may hear it if they will, and there are none but do it sometimes. And if all that are hearers, were likewise doers of the word, what a glorious kingdom, what a special people should we then be ! We should then excel and outshine all the nations upon earth besides. But alas ! the word is not more commonly heard, than it is rarely done among us : of the vast multitudes that go where it is read or preached, there are but few, very few, that ever *lay it to heart*, so as to *practise it in their lives* : though they hear it over and over again, it is all one, it makes no more impression upon the greatest part of those which hear it, than as if it was only an insignificant sound in the air, which they are no way concerned in.

This, I confess, at first sight may seem very strange ; for *shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid ?* Amos iii. 6. Shall Almighty God himself speak, and men not mind it, nor take care to do what he saith ? One would think it impossible, but that we daily see it before our eyes, and therefore cannot doubt but that it is so. The only question is, how it comes to be so : how it comes to pass, that any who are hearers, are not likewise doers of the word. For which several reasons may be given ; some whereof hold

good in one, some in another, and in all in some or other of them.

First therefore, of those who hear the word, some do not understand it : though it be delivered in their own language, and in the plainest terms that can be invented, yet notwithstanding they are so stupid and ignorant, that they understand no more of it than as if it was spoken in an unknown tongue. And in them, as our Lord observeth, *is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand ; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive : for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed ; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them*, Matt. xiii. 14, 15. where we may likewise see the great reason why such people *do not* understand, even because they *will not*. They wilfully shut their eyes against the word, lest they should be converted by it, which they are resolved beforehand not to be ; and then it is no wonder that the word hath no power or effect upon them : for, as it is in the parable of the sower, the word to them is as seed *sown by the way-side, which the fowls of the air pick up and devour* : that is, as our Saviour himself interprets it, *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh that wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart ; this is he which receiveth seed by the way-side*, Matt. xiii. 19. It doth not fall upon him, but beside him ; or at least he shifts it off from himself, by not understanding or apprehending any thing of it.

This is the case of too many among us, and it is a sad case indeed ; for such people are incapable of receiving any benefit by the word they hear : they may hear and hear as long as they live, they can never do what they hear, for they do not know what it is, and all

because they will not. They can take a great deal of pains to understand their calling, and how to manage their worldly affairs ; but they will not take care to understand the word of God, nor so much as the common principles of religion. They were not instructed in them when they were young, and think scorn to be so now, but choose rather to go blindfold to hell, than to have their eyes opened to see whither they are going. Such may be hearers of the word as much as they please ; it is impossible they should ever be doers of it. God grant this may not be the case, the woful case of some here present.

Again, of those who do, or at least can, understand the word they hear, if they would mind it, there are but few that mind it, or take any more notice of it, than as if they did not, or could not understand it. Though their bodies are where the word is read or preached, their minds are not there, but running about upon other things ; upon their houses or shops, their land or money, their creditors or debtors, their friends or their enemies, any thing but what they should be thinking of. This the prophet long ago observed, saying, *They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them : for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness,* Ezek. xxxiii. 31. This is the reason why they are not doers as well as hearers of the word, because while they are hearing it, their hearts are going after their covetousness, after their worldly affairs or business : and their hearts being full of other things there is no room for the word to enter in and work upon them.

I fear there may be some here present, who know all this to be true by themselves : I judge no man, but appeal to every one's conscience : since you came hither, how many places have your hearts been in ? while you have been hearing God's word repeated and explained to you, have not many worldly or vain thoughts been

crowding in together with the word, enough to stifle it ? yea, have they not stifled it altogether in many of you ? Have not others of you been wholly taken up with other thoughts all the while ? Are not some so still, thinking at this moment upon something besides the word you hear, and not at all of that, so as to lay it to your hearts ? How then can you expect any good from it ? Your hearts are shut against the word ; and unless God be pleased to open them, as he did Lydia's, so that you may *attend to the things that are spoken*, Acts xvi. 14. all that is said is but as water spilt upon the ground, which you can never gather up, or make any use of. And this is another great reason why of the many hearers there are so few doers of the word ; even because they do not seriously attend to it, but hear it so negligently and carelessly, as if they were no way concerned in it.

But although a man both understands, and likewise observes the word he hears, yet unless he believe it, he can never do it : for the word doth not work by any virtue inherent in itself, but by the special grace and power of God going along with it, and setting it home upon the hearts of those who hear it. And therefore unless a man believes what he hears to be the word of God, and accordingly receives it as such, so as to be fully persuaded of the truth and certainty of it, it can have no effect upon him : for God never exerts his power, nor manifesteth his grace in a special manner, but only to those who believe in him, and in his holy word : but to them he always doth it, as we learn from the apostle, saying, *For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*, 1 Thess. ii. 13. In them that believe it works effectually, but not in any other. And that is one great reason why many that hear the word are not doers of it, even because whatsoever they may pretend, they do not really believe

it; or, as the apostle words it, *the word preached doth not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that hear it*, Heb. iv. 2. From whence we may likewise observe, that faith is so necessary an ingredient to the making the word we hear to work effectually upon us, that unless it be mixed with our hearing it, we can receive no benefit or profit at all by it, or at least not so much as to excite and enable us to do what we hear. Hence also the apostle useth this as an undeniable argument, to prove the people had not obeyed the Gospel, because they had not believed it, saying, *But they have not all obeyed the Gospel; for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?* Rom. x. 16. as taking it for granted, that as they could not believe it, but they would obey it, so they could not obey it, unless they believed it.

I heartily wish that we had not as much cause as the prophet had to say, *Lord, who hath believed our report?* But I fear that this also is the case of too many among us, who can be content to hear the word, and will not deny but that it is holy, and true, and just, and good; but after all they do not believe it in their hearts: they do not really believe it to be the word of the almighty Creator of the world, that word by which he will judge them at the last day: if they did, it would make their hearts ache, when they hear it reproving them for their sins, and forewarning them of the judgment to come: it would inflame them with the true love of God, and with earnest desires to serve and honour him above all things in the world: it would put them upon constant endeavours to avoid whatsoever God forbids, and do what he commands, lest they fall under his displeasure, and so be lost and undone for ever. Whereas we see by daily experience, that men can sit and hear the word with a great deal of seeming attention, and yet take no more care of doing any thing it requires, than as if they were no way concerned in it; which plainly shews, that notwithstanding their profession of the Christian faith,

they are not fully persuaded of the truth and certainty of it: and then it is no wonder that they are not *doers of the word, but hearers only, deceiving their own selves.*

To which we may add, in the last place, that of those who in some measure believe what they hear whilst they are hearing it, many have no sooner heard it, but they presently forget it, and therefore can never practise it. This reason the apostle himself here suggests to us; for in the words following my text, he compares him that is only a hearer, and not a doer of the word, to *a man that having seen his face in a glass, (or mirror,) straightway goes away, and forgets what manner of man he was*; what dirt or spots he saw in his face, and therefore doth not wipe them off, but lets them continue just as they were before. And then he adds, *But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed*, James i. 25. where he plainly opposeth a forgetful hearer to a doer of the work, as taking it for granted, that the great reason why men do not what they hear, is because they forget it.

There are many such forgetful hearers among us, such as hear much, but forget all they hear: and the reason they pretend for it is, because their memories are so weak that they cannot retain it. But this is a groundless pretence, for they can remember other things well enough. Servants can remember what their masters bid them do; and masters can remember all they have to do in their temporal affairs: why then cannot they remember what Almighty God requires of them, the things that belong to their everlasting peace? not because they cannot, but because they will not remember them. If men would set themselves in good earnest to mind what they hear, they would easily remember all that is necessary for them to do; though they do not remember the very words, they would keep the duty

itself always in their minds, so as to put it into practice. And the reason why they do it not, is not because of the weakness of their memories, but because of the hardness of their hearts ; as our Lord himself intimates in the parable of the sower, saying, *He that receiveth seed into stony places, is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it, yet he hath not root in himself, but dureth for a while : for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended*, Matt. xiii. 20, 21. whereby he gives us to understand, that the word of God to some hearers is like seed sown upon a hard rock, or some stony place, where it hath no depth of earth to take root in, but lies upon the surface or top of the ground, and therefore is carried away by the next wind that blows, and so comes to nought. And then our Lord adds, *He also that receiveth seed among thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choketh the word, and he becometh unfruitful*, ver. 22. which is another great reason why men so commonly forget all they hear, even because the things of this world crowd so fast into their heads, that they stifle and choke the word, razing all the footsteps of it out of their brains, so that they remember no more of it than as if they had never heard it ; as many I believe here present have found by their own experience ; who having heard the word, though they were at present affected with it, yet thinking immediately upon other things, they forget all they heard, and by consequence can never practise any of it.

It is upon some or other of these accounts, that there are so many hearers and so few doers of the word among us : it is either because, although they hear the word, they do not understand it ; or although they understand it, they do not mind it ; or although they mind it, yet they do not believe it ; or else, although they believe it, yet they do not remember it, and therefore do not practise it. Neither is this the case only of some few weak,

inconsiderate persons, but of the far greatest part of our hearers: this is a sad truth, but it is too plain to be denied; we see it verified in the very last duty that you were put in mind of; it was pressed upon you in as plain terms as I could invent, out of God's own word, and that too at several times: and yet I perceive but few that do it, besides those that did it before; you know what I mean: but this is not the only instance; the same holds good in all things else. Whatsoever it is that we read or preach, or any way publish and declare out of God's word, though many seem mighty attentive in hearkening to it, yet when they have done that, they think they have done enough, and concern themselves no farther about it, but go away very well satisfied that they have done their duty; they have been to hear, as if that was all that is required of them: but this is certainly a great cheat, a cheat that men put upon themselves, to the ruin and destruction of their own immortal souls. This I know they will scarcely believe, because it is so great a reflection upon them; but whatsoever they may think, I am sure it is true; for it is attested by God himself, saying, *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* But wherein do they deceive themselves? In many respects: I shall instance in only two: in that they think they do good, when really they do no good, but hurt: and in that they think they get good by such hearing, when they are so far from being better, that they are really the worse for it.

First, they who are not *doers of the word, but hearers only, deceive their own selves*, in that they think by mere hearing the word of God, they do that which is good and acceptable to him, and for the honour of his name. Unless they thought so, they would never hear at all, but live altogether as without God in the world, as many heathenish people in and about this city do; to our shame be it spoken: but they who only hear, are but little better; not but that it is good and necessary

for all men to hear the word of God, that so they may know his will, without which they can never do it, this being the means ordained of God for that purpose ; but then it is only the means, not the end. It is doing that is the end of hearing ; and therefore they who only hear, hear to no end or purpose at all, but cheat themselves of their time, and deceive themselves with the conceit of doing something that is well pleasing unto God ; whereas indeed they do but play the hypocrites with him, making as if they had a mind to do his will, when really they have not ; their design being only to hear it, not to do it ; which he knowing, is so far from being pleased, that he is highly displeased with it : for this is plain mocking and affronting him to his face, and a great dishonour to him, that his creatures should come to hear his will, and he is graciously pleased to make it known to them, and yet after all they will not do it : but *be not deceived, God will not be mocked*. Though you may deceive yourselves, you cannot deceive him : every time you hear, he takes particular notice how ye hear, and what ye hear, and whether you act accordingly or no ; and if ye do, he is graciously pleased to accept of it in Christ, and to bless it to you. But if you do it not, your hearing will not be reckoned among your good but your bad works : it will add both to the number and to the weight of your sins, as you will find at the last day. And whatsoever ye may think at present, you will then clearly see how much ye deceived yourselves in thinking ye did well in hearing the word of God without doing of it.

And if ye do none, ye may be sure that ye can get no good by such hearing. They who expect it, as men commonly do, will find themselves egregiously deceived ; deceived by themselves, in flattering themselves with such vain hopes and expectations, for which they have not the least shadow of any ground or reason. For how can it possibly avail you to hear what ye must do to be saved, unless ye do it ? Is a man ever the better

for hearing of a good bargain or purchase, unless he makes it? Is a man ever the nearer his journey's end for knowing the way thither, unless he walks in it? Ye know he is not. How then can ye imagine, that the hearing the word of God should do you any good, unless ye do it? No, deceive not yourselves, it is impossible. The very word you hear tells you, *Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified*, Rom. ii. 13. And a little after my text, *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, the same not being a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed*, James i. 25. *This man*, and he only, that both hears the word, and doth the work, shall be blessed; and *he shall be blessed in his deed*, not in his *hearing*, but in his *doing* what he hears. He shall be blessed, but none else. To the same purpose is that of our Saviour himself, the foundation and the author of all blessings, saying, *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*, John xiii. 17. Not happy are ye if ye *know* them, but if ye *do* them; implying, that although we cannot do them, unless we know them, yet we shall be never the better for knowing, unless we do them.

But that is not all: for *they who are hearers only, and not doers of the word*, are so far from being better, that they are much the worse for hearing it. For this is a high aggravation of their crime, in that they heard, and so knew the will of God, but yet would not do it. This is to sin against knowledge, to rebel against the light. Such are wilful, obstinate, presumptuous sinners, the worst sort of sinners in the world, and will accordingly have the worst sorts of punishments inflicted on them. If they think otherwise, they do but deceive themselves; for he who cannot lie, hath said, *Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them not, shall be likened to a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that*

house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it, Matt. vii. 26, 27 intimating, that such shall not only fall, but their fall shall be great, greater than other men's : as he himself elsewhere explains it, saying, *That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes : but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes*, Luke xii. 47, 48. All that do not the will of God, shall be beaten, both they that did, and they that did not know it : but they who knew it, and yet would not do it, they shall be most beaten, their punishment shall be the greatest : if there be one place in hell hotter than another, as be sure there is, it shall be for them, even for all such as hear and know the will of God, and yet obstinately refuse to obey it. And though they will not believe it now, they shall then find to their cost the saying of St. Peter to be true, that *it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them*, 2 Pet. ii. 21. so grossly do they deceive themselves, who are hearers only, and not doers of the word.

And yet how common is this among us ? Men generally love to be deceived, and rather than not be deceived at all, they will deceive themselves ; and that too in things of the greatest importance, such as concern their everlasting state ; as appears in many instances, but in none more plainly than in this, that they satisfy themselves with the bare hearing how to get to heaven, and so deceive themselves with the groundless conceit, as if that would bring them thither, without ever doing any thing they hear in order to it ; whereas that, as we have seen, will but sink them lower into the pit of hell.

Hence therefore I pray and beseech you all, as ye tender your own eternal welfare, that you would not put this trick or cheat any longer upon yourselves : *but be*

ye doers of the word, and not hearers only. Whatsoever truth ye hear revealed in the word, be sure to receive it with a firm and stedfast faith ; whatsoever sin ye hear reprov'd, be sure to forsake and avoid it ; whatsoever duty ye hear commanded by Almighty God, be sure to live in the constant performance of it : that so ye may grow wiser and better by every chapter ye hear read, and by every sermon that is preached to you out of God's holy word. For which purpose I would advise you to observe and follow these few directions.

Whensoever you go into the house of God, there, among other things, to hear his most holy word, consider whose word you go to hear ; not the word of a mortal man, nor the word of an angel or archangel, but the word of your almighty Creator, and most merciful Redeemer, the supreme Lawgiver and Judge of the whole world, that word by which he will judge you at the last day. And therefore humbly beseech him, as David did, to *open your eyes, that you may behold the wondrous things of his law*, Psalm cxix. 18. and likewise to open your hearts too, that ye may receive the truth in the love of it.

Having thus prepared yourselves for it, while the word is delivering to you, set yourselves in good earnest to hearken diligently to it ; striving all ye can to apprehend the meaning of every sentence and expression in it. And if any thing be above your reach, as some of the articles of our religion are, howsoever consider from whom it comes, it comes from God, and accordingly believe it upon his word, without searching any farther into it.

But when you hear of any plain truth that God is pleased to reveal to you, of any sin that he forbids you, of any duty that he requires of you, of any punishment that he threatens, or of any blessing that he promiseth to his people ; be sure to mind it, and set it home upon your hearts and consciences ; applying it every one to himself, as much as if it was spoken particularly to him,

and to nobody else, and resolving with himself to act accordingly. Do not look upon any thing as meant only of other people, as some are apt to do ; but every one should look upon every thing as directed immediately to himself : for without such a particular application of what ye hear to yourselves, ye can never be truly touched or affected with it, so as to receive any real benefit or comfort from it.

Neither must you only thus take every one what he hears to himself, but you must take it as from God ; you must receive it *not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God*, 1 Thess. ii. 13. and therefore you must receive it with such a faith as is due to God's own word, which being the firmest ground we can have, whereupon to build our faith, it requires the strongest faith that can be built upon it : and accordingly, whatsoever it is that you hear out of his word, you must not doubt, but be fully persuaded in your minds, that it is both infallibly true, and absolutely necessary for you to know and do, otherwise he would not have told you of it.

When ye have thus, by a quick and lively faith, received the word into your hearts, be sure to keep it there. Do not suffer any vain thoughts, idle discourse, or worldly business, to justle it out again ; but still continue to exercise your faith upon it ; and that, by the grace of God co-operating with his word, will certainly put you upon doing of the work.

Wherefore, in short, as ever ye desire never to hear the word in vain, whensoever ye go to hear it, carefully observe the apostle's direction, in the words before my text, *Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls*. Receive it so by faith, that it may be ingrafted in your hearts, and so bring forth fruit unto salvation. For which purpose, always carry what ye have now heard in your minds ; *be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiv-*

ing your own selves. That the word you have now heard may, by the blessing of God, be the means of your doing whatsoever else ye shall hereafter hear : by which means this one sermon will make all others profitable to you, and effectual to the saving of your souls. And so our preaching will never be in vain, nor your hearing in vain : for being both hearers and doers of the word, you will go from strength to strength, and every day grow more and more in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ : to whom be glory for ever.

S E R M O N C X I I .

THE DUTY AND ADVANTAGE OF SEEKING THINGS SPIRITUAL.

MATT. vi. 33.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

ALTHOUGH we are only strangers and pilgrims in this world, and know not how soon, but are certain that ere long we shall be taken out of it; yet we are very apt to be as thoughtful and solicitous about the little affairs and concerns of it, as if we were to live in it for ever: insomuch that seeing we cannot live here at all without eating and drinking, nor conveniently without clothing, we commonly mind little else, but either to feed or clothe ourselves, or else to provide wherewithal to do it. Neither is this the sin and folly only of the place and age we live in. It was so among God's own peculiar people, when his only-begotten Son vouchsafed to converse with them in our nature. He could not but take notice that they also, as well as other people, were exceedingly addicted to it; and therefore, in this chapter, useth the most clear and proper motives that could be thought of, to dissuade them and us from it. First, saith he, *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye can-*

not serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on, ver. 24, 25. As if he should have said, Ye profess to serve God, but that ye cannot do, so long as you serve this world: for *no man can serve two masters*. For he that hath two masters, will either *hate the one, and love the other*; or if he doth not do that, he will *hold to the one*, so as to do his work, *and despise the other*, so as not to do what he requires. This is a general rule that holds good in all cases, especially in this of serving *God and mammon*; no man can possibly serve two masters that are so contrary to one another as they are. He whose mind is bent upon serving God, must needs despise and contemn this world; and he whose thoughts are distracted about the things of this world, it is impossible that his heart should be united in serving God. And therefore, as ever ye desire to serve God, as you profess to do, I say unto you, I advise and counsel you, do not distract and perplex your minds with taking care and thoughtfulness about this life, *what ye shall eat, or drink, or wear: for, consider likewise, is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* And therefore God, who doth the greater, cannot he do the less? He that gives you life, cannot he give you meat to preserve it? He that made the body, cannot he provide raiment for it to clothe it, without your being so anxious and solicitous about it, as to neglect his service for it?

Behold also the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ver. 26. Though the fowls of the air, as all other creatures, are good in their kind, yet are not you, who were made in the likeness of God himself, much better? And yet you see that he feeds them. How then can ye doubt but he will take care of you, without your being so over-careful for yourselves? And

besides, consider how vain and foolish all such anxious care and thoughtfulness is ; for, *which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature ?* ver. 27 Which of you, by all your cunning and artifice, can make their bodies higher, or their lives one minute longer, than God hath determined they should be ? *And why take ye thought for raiment ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin ; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these,* ver. 28, 29. *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is so fresh and flourishing, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ?* ver. 30. Is not this a great instance of your infidelity, or at least of the weakness of your faith, that you should mistrust God's providence and care to provide sufficient clothing for you, notwithstanding that you see him make such plentiful provision of it for the very flowers of the field, that the royal apparel of the wisest and greatest of kings, even of Solomon himself, could not shine so gloriously as they do ? *Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat ? or what shall we drink ? or wherewithal shall we be clothed ? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek,* ver. 31, 32. The heathens, who do not know God, nor believe his providence, they indeed are solicitous about these things : but will you be like them ? No surely ; especially considering, that *your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of such things.* You have a Father in heaven, who knows that you cannot live without these things, and therefore you may be confident that he will provide them for you, without your distracting and perplexing yourselves with anxious care and solicitude about them. But instead of that, I will direct you to an infallible way, how you may be sure never to want any of these things which are necessary for you ; which, in short, is this, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then*

(ye have my word for it) *all these things shall be added to you.*

Where we may observe two things : first, the method prescribed by our Lord for that purpose, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness* : and then, the certainty of that method, *and all these things shall be added to you.*

The first thing to be here considered is, the method which our Lord prescribes, whereby to have all things necessary for this life bestowed upon us, without our being too careful and anxious about them : I say, without our being too careful and anxious : for so the word *μεριμνᾶτε* here used properly signifies. So that our Lord doth not here forbid what we are elsewhere commanded, even to have a sober, prudent, and moderate care even of the things of this world, so as to be diligent in your respective callings, and by that means to provide necessities both for yourselves and families ; for he that doth not do that, *hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel* ; as St. Paul himself, who perfectly understood our Lord's meaning, saith, 1 Tim. v. 8. But that which our great Master here requires of us and all his disciples or scholars is, that our thoughts be not so taken up about the things of this world, as to be taken off from serving God, or distracted in the performance of it : as appears from the reasons which he himself here gives, why he would not have us so thoughtful about the world, even because we *cannot serve God and mammon*, ver. 24. For from hence it is manifest, that he forbids only such excessive and immoderate care and thoughtfulness about the things of this world, as impedes and disturbs us in our serving God. But such a moderate care and providence for the necessities of this present life, as is consistent with, or any way subservient to, the great end of living here, even to our serving and honouring him in whom we live, that certainly is not only lawful, but our duty ; and our Saviour is so far from forbidding that, that he rather

commands it, in that he commands us to serve God, which we cannot do without such things as are necessary to our present subsistence; which we have no ground to expect, without using the means which God hath appointed for that end, by being diligent and industrious in the calling, which he, for that purpose, hath placed us in. But even in this also, our Master hath here taught us how to carry ourselves, even to do our duty, to mind every one his own business, and not to trouble or torment ourselves with what may, or what may not be the issue of it; but to leave that to God, and trust on him for his blessing upon our endeavours, to make them successful and effectual to all things necessary both for life and godliness. And indeed it is only a diffident and mistrustful care for the things of this life, which our Saviour here forbids; when men mind their calling, and yet fear they shall want, not believing or trusting in God for his blessing on what they do, but either thinking to provide necessities for themselves without him, or else, fearing that he, notwithstanding their endeavours, will not provide them for them: *Wherefore, saith he, if God so clothe the grass of the field, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?* ver. 30. whereby he plainly shews, that the care which he there condemns, is that which is accompanied with the want or weakness of our faith in God; when, notwithstanding all the promises that he hath made us, and all the blessings he hath already bestowed upon us, we will not believe him, nor trust him for the future, but still are full of fears and jealousies of what may befall us hereafter, and whether we may not one time or other want even necessary food and raiment. This is that sinful care and thoughtfulness about the things of this life, which our Saviour here forbids: and that his disciples may never be guilty of it, he directs them to a most certain way how to be sure of all things necessary, without their being so anxious and solicitous about

them, even by *seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness* in the first place.

Now we being all in the number of his disciples, cannot but look upon ourselves as obliged to learn and practise whatsoever he, our great Lord and Master, hath taught us, especially in a matter which doth so nearly concern us as this doth : for I dare say, we all desire to take the best course we can, whereby to secure to ourselves a sufficient maintenance, whilst we are in this world, so as to be sure never to want food, or raiment, or any thing that we shall have a real occasion for : and this is that which our blessed Saviour here directs us to ; insomuch that if we do but rightly understand his meaning in these words, and act accordingly, we may be confident that we shall never want any thing that is good for us.

For this purpose therefore we shall take the words apart, and consider what our Lord means by *the kingdom of God and his righteousness* ; what by *seeking* ; and what by *seeking of it* in the *first* place ; for then we shall easily apprehend what he would have us do, when he saith, *But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*

First, therefore, by *the kingdom of God*, our Lord here means that kingdom of his, which he himself saith *is not of this world*, John xviii. 36. that invisible and spiritual kingdom which he erects in the hearts of men, and governs by the sweet influences of his holy Spirit, leading them into all truth, and goodness, and virtue ; to every thing that is acceptable to God, and for the advancement of his honour and glory. This is that kingdom of God, which Christ himself saith is *within us*, Luke xvii. 21 and that which his apostle speaks of, where he saith, that *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, Rom. xiv. 17

Now this kingdom of God, although it be not of this

world, it is begun in it, being first set up in the souls of men whilst they are united to their bodies, where it meets with much opposition ; *the flesh*, as the apostle speaks, *lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh ; and these are contrary the one to the other*, Gal. v. 17. By which means it comes to pass, that this kingdom is always embroiled with spiritual wars and tumults, so long as it is in this world ; and although it doth not only keep its ground, but get the victory too even in this, yet it triumphs only in the other world, where all its enemies being perfectly subdued, it enjoys perpetual tranquillity and peace. And there it is, that all the subjects of this kingdom are advanced to the highest degrees of honour and happiness that creatures can be invested with ; being all crowned with glory and immortality, and transported continually with the rays of divine light shining upon them, and filling them with all the joy and comfort that their nature is capable of ; and that too not only for some years or ages, but for ever and ever : *for of this kingdom there shall be no end*, Luke i. 33.

This is that kingdom of God, which his only-begotten Son hath purchased for mankind with his own blood, and which he would have us therefore to look after before all things else, saying, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God* ; and that we may the better understand both the nature of this kingdom, and the way to it, he adds, *and his righteousness*, implying, that this kingdom of God is composed altogether, and made up of righteousness. The crown of it is a crown of righteousness, the sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness, and its whole form and constitution is founded and established in the righteousness of God ; so that none can seek so as to obtain this kingdom of God, but he must at the same time seek his righteousness too, without which it is impossible for any man to be admitted into or to enjoy the privileges and immunities of this kingdom.

Where by *righteousness* we are to understand, as the

word generally signifies, that habit or disposition of the mind, whereby we are always ready and willing to perform our whole duty both to God and man, and so to give what we owe to each of them : for though the word in its strict sense be sometimes restrained to our dealings with one another ; yet in its general and enlarged notion, wherein it is here to be understood, it hath respect also unto God, to whom we are more indebted, and therefore owe more than we do, or can do, to men : for we are indebted to him for every thing we have, yea for every thing we are, for our very souls and bodies, and therefore should glorify him in both. Insomuch that to our being just and righteous towards God, it is necessary that we apprehend and esteem him as our chiefest good ; that we desire and love him with all our hearts, serve and honour him with all our might ; that we praise and thank him for whatsoever we have, and pray to him, and him alone, for what we want ; that we believe his word, fear his threatenings, trust on his promises, and observe his precepts to the utmost of our power ; that we adore and worship him with reverence and godly fear, and do all we can to promote his honour and glory in the world : in short, he that would render unto God his whole due, must give up all he is to him, lay out all he hath for him, and make it his constant care and study to please, obey, and glorify him in every thing he thinks, or speaks, or doth.

For this we owe to God, and therefore ought in justice or righteousness to pay it, as well as what we owe to men ; concerning whom God himself commands us to render unto all their due, *tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour*, Rom. xiii. 7. that we render to Cesar the things which are Cesar's, as well as to God the things that are God's, Matt. xxii. 21. that we speak evil of no man, but love and honour all ; that we do not deceive, or cheat, or defraud one another in any matter, but in all our dealings observe that golden

rule which our great Master hath set us, saying, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them ; for this is the law and the prophets*, Matt. vii. 12. that is, this is the sum and substance of whatsoever is required of us, either in the law or prophets, as to our carriage and behaviour one to another.

He who thus exerciseth himself as St. Paul did, *to have always a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards men*, by performing whatsoever he knows to be his duty to both ; such a one may truly and properly be called a just or righteous man. And this is that righteousness which our blessed Saviour here speaks of, and calls *the righteousness of God* ; not but that it may in some sense be termed also our righteousness, as being wrought both in us and by us ; in us as the subjects, by us as the instruments, and in some measure the co-operative causes of it. But yet it is most properly here called the righteousness of God, because it is of his commanding, of his infusing, and of his accepting.

First, it is of his commanding : it is that which the most high God doth expressly require of us, both in his law and prophets, wherein he hath revealed his will and pleasure to us ; what he would have us to do, and what not to do, both as to himself and to one another. And he who therefore doth what God commands because he commands it, and avoids what he forbids because he forbids it, such a man is properly righteous towards God, and such righteousness may be truly called the righteousness of God, as being commanded by him, and performed only in obedience to that command.

And as it is God who requires this righteousness of us, so it is he also who infuseth it into us, and gives us both grace and power to do it ; or, as the apostle words it, *it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*, Phil. ii. 13. That is, he both inclines our wills to do what he commands, and assisteth us also in the doing of it : for we are assured, not only

from Scripture, but likewise from our own experience, that *we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God*, 2 Cor. iii. 5. And if we cannot so much as think, much less can we do any thing that is truly good, without God, who, as he is the chiefest good in himself, so is he the fountain of all the goodness that is in any of his creatures, and particularly in mankind ; it all flows from him, and is derived to them by his Son, our Saviour and Mediator, Jesus Christ, who therefore tells us, that *without him we can do nothing*, John xv. 5. that is, we can do nothing that is truly good without him ; but by him there is nothing that is truly good but we may do it ; as St. Paul found by experience, when he said, *I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me*, Phil. iv. 13. implying, that notwithstanding his natural weakness and inability to please and obey God, or to work righteousness by his own strength, yet he was able to do it by that grace and assistance which he received from God himself, by means of Christ's merits and intercession for him. And so it is that we must do good, if ever we do any at all ; it must be by the power of God, enlightening our minds, influencing our wills, directing our intentions, strengthening our resolutions, co-operating all along with us, and so enabling us effectually to do it. Hence it is, that in the Collect which our church hath appointed for the first sunday after Epiphany, we pray to God, that *he would grant that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord*. Wherefore seeing all the righteousness that we either have or do proceeds from God, and is both begun, continued, and perfected by him, it may most properly be called, as it really is, the righteousness of God.

And so it may be also because it is of his accepting when it is done : for as it is done by us, it is so imperfect, that it doth not deserve the name of righteousness.

It is true, God gives us sufficient power to do it ; but we, by reason of our natural weakness and infirmities, do not so use that power, as to adjust what we do exactly to the rule that God hath set us : but every deviation from that rule is sin or unrighteousness ; and therefore in the most exact righteousness that we perform, there is so much sin and unrighteousness inixed with it, that God may justly disown and reject it, and not accept of it as any righteousness at all : but nevertheless God is pleased to accept of it as well as if it was perfect, upon the account of that absolutely perfect righteousness and obedience which his Son performed to him in our nature ; in whom we are therefore said *to be made the righteousness of God*, 2 Cor. v. 21. that is, both we and our righteousness are accepted of before God. Hence the apostle calls it, *the righteousness which is of God by faith*, Phil. iii. 9. because it is by our believing in Christ, that his righteousness is made ours, and ours is made acceptable to God by it : so that to speak properly, whatsoever righteousness we have or do, is more truly God's righteousness than ours ; forasmuch as it is no farther true righteousness, than as the righteousness of Christ is superadded to it, and God is pleased to accept of it as such for his sake. And this I look upon as the great reason why our Saviour here calls it, *the righteousness of God* ; and why he would have us to seek it, together with the kingdom of God ; because it is proper and peculiar to that kingdom, and can never be separated from it, nor any where attained but only in it : so that he who seeks the kingdom of God without his righteousness, or his righteousness without his kingdom, is sure to lose his labour, for he can never find either ; whereas, if we seek them both together, we shall likewise obtain them both together ; for at the same time that we are admitted into the kingdom of God, we shall also be invested with his righteousness, and so made fit subjects for such a kingdom as that is. But then you will say, What doth our Lord mean by seeking of this kingdom

of God and his righteousness ? and how would he have us seek it, so as to be sure to find it ? For that we must know in general, that there are several things required as necessary to dispose and prepare us for the *seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness*. It is necessary that we believe or know there is such a kingdom, and such righteousness to be had ; that it is worth our while to look after it ; and that if we do look after it as we ought, we may certainly have it : but these things, I suppose, you are all fully satisfied in, and therefore do earnestly desire to attain this kingdom and righteousness, and are so stedfastly resolved to do all ye can for it. And verily such a resolution is the first step towards it ; and, if rightly pursued, will bring you to it : whereas unless you be resolved to seek it in good earnest, it will be in vain to tell you how to do it. But howsoever, whether you be resolved upon it or no, I must explain my Master's meaning to you, and shew what it is that he would have you to do, when he commands you *to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, and that too in the first place, or before all other things.

First therefore, when our blessed Saviour commands you *to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, his will and pleasure in short is this, that you constantly and sincerely make use of all means, such as he hath prescribed, whereby to obtain and practise true grace and virtue, that you may become such persons as God will accept of as righteous, and therefore admit into his kingdom, through Jesus Christ. For which purpose, it is necessary that you consult and study the word of God, wherein he hath revealed his will to you, and told you what he would have you to believe, and think, and speak, and do, that ye may be saved. Hence, as our Saviour here commands you *to seek the kingdom of God*, he elsewhere commands you *to search the Scriptures*, John v. 39. because they direct you into the way that leads to that kingdom, and shew you likewise how to walk in it. It is by them also that ye may

know how to work righteousness, and how to make it the righteousness of God, acceptable and well-pleasing unto him; which unless you know, it is impossible for you to do. But then on the other side too, unless you do it, it is in vain to know it: and therefore when by reading or hearing God's holy word read or expounded to you, you are acquainted with his divine will, you must endeavour all you can to observe and obey it, and to order your whole lives and conversations according to it.

But seeing you cannot do it by your own strength, you must make it your daily prayer to Almighty God, that he, for his Son's sake, would assist you with his grace and holy Spirit in the doing of it: but you must be sure to ask in faith, nothing doubting, but firmly believing our Saviour's words, where he saith, *If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give his holy Spirit to them that ask him?* Luke xi. 13. that is, to them that earnestly desire, and faithfully pray to him for such a measure of his holy Spirit, whereby they may be sanctified throughout, and made really and truly holy, so as to serve and honour him with a perfect heart and a willing mind. They who thus pray to God, and trust in the promises which he hath made us to that purpose in Jesus Christ, cannot fail wof hat they so pray for; especially if they constantly make this the great subject of their private, as it is of our public devotions, wherein we daily implore his divine Majesty to give us repentance and his holy Spirit, that what we do may always please him, and that our lives may be pure and holy in his sight. But when we pray for so great a blessing as this is, either in public or in private, we must be sure to do it heartily, sincerely, and with that earnestness of desire that is suitable to the greatness of the blessing we desire, which is indeed the greatest we can ever have.

Wherefore, as you tender your own spiritual and eternal good, I advise and beseech you all to make con-

science of frequenting the prayers of our church, and to be as serious and intent in them as ye possibly can ; and not only in praying, but likewise in praising God for all the expressions of his undeserved love and goodness already vouchsafed to you, as remembering that thankfulness to God for the blessings we enjoy, is a sure means whereby to obtain those we want. But to make both your prayers and praises more acceptable to God, and beneficial to yourselves, it is requisite that you often join fasting with them, that so your bodies being kept under, your souls may exercise themselves more freely in such high and heavenly employments as those are ; especially when ye pray, as ye ought always to do, for the illuminations and assistances of God's holy Spirit. For as our Saviour saith there is some kind of wicked spirits that will not go out without prayer and fasting ; so there are some persons into whom God's holy Spirit will not come, without fasting as well as praying for him : because without that, their bodies being full of corrupt and sinful humours, they will not be fit temples for the Holy Ghost to dwell in ; which St. Paul was so sensible of, that he always kept his body under, and *brought it into subjection, lest that by any means, when he had preached unto others, he himself should be a cast-away*, 1 Cor. ix. 27

There is one thing still behind that is of very great use in order to our partaking of the gifts and graces of God's holy Spirit, and by consequence of his kingdom and righteousness, and that is the sacrament of our Lord's supper, ordained on purpose to put us in mind of, and so to exercise our faith in him, who with his own blood purchased the power and right of bestowing the Spirit upon us, and therefore is always willing and ready to do it. And though I do not deny but that he often doth it in other duties as well as this ; yet I dare positively affirm, that the frequent and worthy receiving of Christ's mystical body and blood, is the most effectual means that we can ever use whereby to receive his holy

Spirit too: that being so spiritual and divine a duty, that it raiseth up our spirits, as I may so speak, to meet it, or, at least, qualifies or disposeth our minds so rarely for it, that unless we fail in receiving that holy sacrament, we cannot certainly fail of receiving the holy Spirit also, at least such a measure of it as is necessary for us in our present circumstances. These are, in short, those means of grace which God hath prescribed for our obtaining his kingdom and righteousness: and if we desire the end, we must use these means, not only by the by, and when we have nothing else to do, but diligently, industriously, constantly, believingly, trusting on God for his blessing upon them. Thus it is that Christ would have us *seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*. But then we must observe withal, that he would have us seek it in the first place; *But seek ye first, saith he, the kingdom of God and his righteousness*; that is, seek it before all things else, not only before riches, and honours, and pleasures, the impertinencies, and superfluities of this life, but before those things which are necessary to this life, yea, and before that life itself to which they are necessary.

Wherefore all such among you as desire punctually to observe what our great Lord and Master doth here command, must make it your first and great care and study, whilst you are in this world, to be wise, and holy, and good, and righteous, such as the Gospel requires and obligeth all to be; and for that purpose you must sincerely and constantly use those means which are appointed for that end. You must not only read or hear the Scriptures now and then, but you must really prefer them before all other writings in the world, and so *mark, learn, and inwardly digest them*, that you may understand how to serve and please God better than any other art or science whatsoever. Neither must you pray only sometimes, but it must be your daily employment, yea, the first and last thing you do every day. And living in a place where you have the opportunity of performing your

public as well as private devotions every day, you must prize it before all temporal blessings, and not suffer every little worldly business to keep you from them. And seeing it is requisite that you often join fasting with your prayers, you must not look upon it as a severe task imposed upon you, but make it your pleasure and delight, so as to esteem a day spent in fasting and prayer beyond the greatest feasts you can be at. And as for the Lord's supper, that is so heavenly, so divine a banquet, that you must always hunger and thirst after it, and bless God that you are so frequently invited to it, that you may feed upon the bread of life, and derive grace and strength from Christ, to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to *live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*: which you ought to account, as really it is, the greatest happiness you can enjoy on this side heaven; and by consequence neglect no opportunity of partaking of it: at least, never let the trifling concerns of this world deprive you of the comfort and advantage you may receive by it, which is so great, so exceeding great, that I am confident, were you once accustomed to the frequent and worthy receiving of that holy sacrament, you would think it as impossible to receive it too frequently, as it is to receive it too worthily.

All such among you as really and sincerely desire to *seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, in the first place, must, in the first also, use these and the like means which tend to that end, so as to prefer them both in your judgment and practice before those which tend only to the advancement of your estates and reputation in the world; otherwise you cannot be said to do what our Saviour here requires of you. And he be sure would never have required this of you, if you could have been saved without it: for he having purchased the kingdom of God for you at no less a price than with his own blood, you may be confident that he requires no more on your parts, than what is absolutely necessary

in order to your obtaining of it. And therefore he having commanded you to seek it in the first place, unless you do so, you have no ground to expect ever to have it.

But although Christ's command is a sufficient ground of your duty, and we are therefore bound to do what he commands us, because he commands us to do it, whether we understand the reason of it or no; yet howsoever, that you may see what great reason he had to command, and you have to obey him in it, I desire you to consider,

First, that the best things are always to be sought in the first place. This you cannot but all acknowledge to be the general rule for all rational creatures to walk by, and which you yourselves pretend to observe in all the actions of your life; for if two things be offered to you, the one better and the other worse, you would account it a great piece of folly and madness to choose the worse before the better: I dare say you would not do it in your common conversation, and trafficking with one another about the things of this world; but what you apprehend or believe to be the best, that you will choose and desire first. And so all must do, that would carry themselves like rational as well as free agents.

Now do but apply this certain and plain rule to the matter in hand, and you will easily see the reasonableness of this command: for you cannot but all acknowledge, that the kingdom of God and his righteousness is really better than all things of this life, yea, the best thing that you can ever have. Should I ask you one by one, whether you do not think so, I dare say you could not deny it, but would rather be angry at my making any question: What, would you say, do you think us such fools and madmen, as not to believe and know the kingdom of God is better than all the kingdoms of this world, and his righteousness than all the riches in it? this is to question whether we be Christians, yea, whether we be men or no. For reason as well as

religion teacheth us, that he who made all things, must needs be better than all things he made ; and by consequence that his love and favour must needs be the best thing, the greatest good that we can ever have. But do ye really believe this ? Then, if ye do but consult your own natural reason, that will teach you, that you ought to seek it in the first place, and that unless you do so, your practice will contradict both your faith and reason, and so you will live rather like beasts than either Christians or men.

Especially, if to this you add, that the kingdom of God and his righteousness is not only better, but so infinitely better than the things of this life, that in comparison of that, they can scarcely be said to be good at all. And therefore the same reason that obligeth you to seek that before them, obligeth you also to seek it so far before them, as not to seek them at all in comparison of it. From whence you may clearly see the great reasonableness of that command which our Saviour here lays upon you.

Which will farther appear also, if you consider withal, that as the kingdom of God is the best thing in the world that you can ever seek, so it is the hardest matter in the world ever to obtain it : for he that hath opened the gate, and made way for you to go thither, hath told you in plain terms, that *the gate is strait, and the way narrow that leads to it*, and that there be but *few that find it*, Matt. vii. 14. And seeing there is so much time and pains required to the getting of it, it is no wonder that he here adviseth you to seek it first. As for your time, that, as you all know, at the longest is but short, and at the best but very uncertain ; insomuch, that unless ye begin to seek it now, before all other things, you cannot promise yourselves any time at all to do it in, or at the most not enough. And as for the care and pains you must take for so great a good, when you once set about it in good earnest, you will find that ail you can do will be little enough for it ; and

therefore you had need lay out yourselves wholly in the pursuit of it, more than for all things else, otherwise you had as good never pursue it at all, for you are never likely to attain it. Wherefore, as ever ye desire to *seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness* at all, you must be sure to seek it, as our Lord here commands, in the first place, or before all things else, lest otherwise you seek it to no purpose, even so as never to find it.

But how difficult soever this work be, it is the most necessary work we have to do in this world, and therefore must needs be done first. It is the great work that we were made for: we were not made to scrape up dirt, nor to gape after popular air, nor yet to gratify our flesh with sensual pleasures; but we were made to serve and honour him that made us, by seeking his kingdom and glory: and therefore except we do that, we spend our time in vain, and live to no purpose at all, but do as much as in us lies to frustrate the very end of our creation. And there is all the reason in the world that we should do that first, which is so absolutely necessary to be done, that without that, whatsoever else we do will signify nothing, but we had as good sit still and be idle all the days of our life, and so go out of the world without ever having done any good in it. Neither is it necessary only to our accomplishing God's end in making us, but it is necessary also to our attainment of true happiness, which the things of this world are not: for true happiness being seated only in the mind, nothing that is without us can contribute any thing towards it. But a man may be as happy without wealth, or honour, or health, or liberty, or life itself, as he can be with it. Nay, it is much to be observed, that the things of this world are so far from being able to make us happy, that we can never be perfectly happy so long as we have them; but we must of necessity leave not only all things in this world, but this very world itself, and go into the other, before we can have true and perfect happiness: whereas on the other side, the kingdom

of God and his righteousness are so necessary, so indispensably necessary to our being happy, that it is as impossible for us to be happy without them, as it is to be miserable with them. For all true happiness consisteth only in the enjoyment of God, the supreme and only good : but we can never enjoy God any where but in his own kingdom ; nor there, except we be first made righteous, and so, according to our capacity, like unto him. And therefore, as ever we desire to be truly, and really, and eternally happy, we must of necessity seek God's kingdom and righteousness, which our Saviour himself elsewhere calls, *the one thing needful*, Luke x. 42. And therefore it is no wonder that he here commands us to seek it first ; all other things, in comparison of that, being superfluous and unnecessary.

It is true, whilst we are in the body, there are some things necessary to our being in it, though not our being happy ; as meat, and drink, and clothing, which are the ordinary means whereby these houses of clay wherein we dwell are supported and defended from wind and weather. But though there may be some necessity of our having such things, there is none at all for our seeking of them with care and anxiety of mind : for we may have them without that, far better than with it ; as appears from the promise which our Lord here makes to those who *first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, that *all these things shall be added to them* : which also suggests to us another great reason why we ought to seek the kingdom of God in the first place ; because, if we do that, all things else that are any way needful for us, shall be added to us.

And all these things shall be added to you ; that is, if you first seek God's kingdom, you shall not only find that, but all things that are needful for you while you are upon earth, *προσέθισονται*, *shall be added to you* over and above what you first sought : they shall be given you, as the word intimates, like paper and packthread into the bargain. Concerning which promise there are

two things much to be observed; first, the certainty, and then the extent of it.

The certainty of this promise appears from the power and faithfulness of him that made it, even Christ himself; who being of infinite power, can do what he will; and being of infinite truth and faithfulness, will do all he can for the fulfilling of it. And therefore he having passed his word, and made this promise to us with his own mouth, we ought not, we cannot doubt but he will most certainly make it good; *for heaven and earth shall pass away, but, as he himself saith, his words shall not pass away*, Matt. xxiv. 35. He hath said, *that if you first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto you*: which being his own words, if you do what he here requires of you, he will most certainly do what he hath promised to you. If you first take care to serve and please God, by walking in the ways of *holiness and righteousness before him all the days of your life*, he will take care that you shall never want any thing that is truly good and needful for you.

Which you cannot but be fully confident of, if you do but consider also the extent of this promise, in that he doth not say, some, or many, or most, but *all these things shall be added to you*; that is, as he explains himself in the verse before my text, *All these things which our heavenly Father knoweth we have need of*. For such things as we have no need of, and that in the judgment of God himself, it is no matter whether we have them or no; but all such things as God himself knows to be any way necessary for us, they are all contained in this promise which our Lord here makes us, and which he had made before by his holy Spirit in David, saying, *They that seek the Lord, shall not want any good thing*, Psal. xxxiv. 10. What is not good for us, although we have it not, ye we cannot be said to want it, because if we had it, it would do us no good; and therefore it is said in the same place, *that there is no*

want to them that fear God, ver. 9. because they have all things that are any way needful or good for them. And what our Lord here promised by his prophet, he here repeats with his own mouth, assuring us, that all they who *first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, shall have *all things* necessary both for life and godliness *added to them*.

Here then you see the best course you can ever take, whereby to secure to yourselves not only a sufficient maintenance, but a constant supply of all things that you can ever have any real occasion for in this world. Do but first repent and turn to God, so as to be admitted into his kingdom, and partake of his righteousness, and then all such things will be immediately conferred and settled upon you. You have the word of Christ, of God himself, for it; which you must needs acknowledge to be the best security in the world, and therefore ought to rest fully satisfied with it. Wherefore, as ever ye desire to be certain never to want any thing that is good for you, take this course which Christ himself hath prescribed for it; which you will find to be the only certain course you can ever take, forasmuch as God hath never promised his blessing or success to any other means. I do not deny but that he often scatters the things of this world among the men of it, who may gather them up in great abundance; but this is more than he ever promised them, and by consequence they have no ground to expect it. And whatsoever such men may have, they are still in want: they often want even what they have, and they always want God's blessing upon it, and therefore had as good, if not much better, be without it; whereas, by observing the method which our Lord here teaches, you will be certain to have whatsoever is good in itself, and likewise God's blessing upon it to make it good for you.

Wherefore, as ever ye desire to carry yourselves as becometh Christians indeed, you must be sure to do what Christ hath here commanded. Make it your great

care and study to serve and honour God, and to seek his kingdom and righteousness in the first place. And when you thus sincerely perform what he hath required of you, you may be confident that he will likewise perform what he hath promised to you. He will defend and protect you from all evil, and give you whatsoever is really good for you, either in this world or the next. You shall never want either food or raiment, nor yet his blessing upon it. Which that you may be fully assured of, he himself hath here engaged his own word for it, saying to you all, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*

S E R M O N CXIII.

THE SINFULNESS AND MISCHIEF OF WORLDLY ANXIETY.

PHIL. iv. 6.

*Be careful for nothing ; but in every thing by prayer
and supplication with thanksgiving let your re-
quests be made known unto God.*

ALTHOUGH the commandments of God now seem grievous to us, and very difficult to be observed, yet certainly they were designed at first for our ease and pleasure ; they being all so exactly adapted to our nature, so agreeable to the temper we were made of, that every act of obedience to them refresheth and delights our minds, as David long ago observed, calling the *commandments his delights*, Psal. cxix. 143. and saying, that *in keeping of them there is great reward*, Psal. xix. 11. The same might be demonstrated by a particular induction of them, whereby it would be easy to shew, that nothing is forbidden us, but what is some way or other hurtful and prejudicial to us, nothing required of us, but what is really for our good, and conduceth to our present comfort, as well as to our future happiness. I shall instance at present only in that which is enjoined in my text.

We cannot but be all sensible, how great a misery it is to live in continual fears and cares about the things of this life, and how happily they live, who are free from

them, so as never to be disturbed or disquieted in their minds about any thing here below ; especially if this proceeds from such principles, and are grounded upon such a foundation as is firm and lasting : and yet we not only may, but ought always to live thus : for this is that which is here enjoined us by the apostle, saying, *Be careful for nothing*, &c.

The apostle here, in the close of his Epistle to them, is directing the Philippians how both to carry and support themselves under the various occurrences of this present life. They were likely to meet with many crosses and troubles in the way to heaven, but howsoever he would not have them dejected, but always pleasant and cheerful under them : *Rejoice*, saith he, *in the Lord always* ; and to press it the more home upon them, he repeats it again, saying, *again I say, Rejoice*, ver. 4. And although they should receive many affronts and injuries from others, yet he would have them always of an even and sedate temper ; not hot and furious, but candid and ingenuous, meek and patient, peaceable and good to all. *Let your moderation*, saith he, *be known unto all men ; the Lord is at hand*, both to assist you at present, and ere long to rescue and deliver you. And because they were to expect to be sometimes brought into great straits and difficulties, not knowing well what to do, in such cases he adviseth them not to be too anxious or solicitous, but to do their duty, and to leave the issue to God : *Be careful*, saith he, *for nothing ; but in every thing give thanks*, &c. This is in general the sense of the words ; but lest we should mistake them, and that we may more clearly and fully understand the mind of the Holy Ghost in them, I shall, by his assistance, shew in what sense we are not, and in what sense we are, to understand this precept, *Be careful for nothing* ; and then explain the following words, wherein the apostle directs what to do in all such cases as are apt to put us upon too much thoughtfulness and care, saying, *but by prayer and supplication with*

thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

First therefore, we may observe that the apostle is here speaking not of spiritual but temporal things; and therefore where he saith, *be careful for nothing*, he is to be understood only of the things of this life, not of those things which concern the life to come; for they ought to be our chief and greatest care of all. And in this very place, where the apostle commands the Philippians to be *careful for nothing*, he commends them for being careful of him, that is, of performing the duty which they owed him as the minister of Christ. *I rejoiced*, saith he, *greatly in the Lord, that now at last your care of me hath flourished again, wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity*, ver. 10. From whence it appears, that the apostle himself distinguisheth between the care of doing our duty to God, and the care of this world, and commends the one as much as he condemns the other. The same apostle elsewhere makes the same distinction more plain, saying, *But I would have you without carefulness: he that is unmarried, careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married, careth for the things that are of this world, how he may please his wife*, 1 Cor. vii. 32, 33. where he first lays down the general rule that he would have them, ἀμεγίμους, *without carefulness*, the same that is in my text, μηδὲν μεγίμνατε, *be careful for nothing*. But then he explains himself, by distinguishing between the things that belong unto the Lord, and the things of the world. About the latter he would have them without carefulness, but not about the former; not about the things that belong unto the Lord, how they may please the Lord. The rule is not to be understood of such things; for, as he himself there intimates, we ought to take care of them, and not of the other. For that very reason we may take care of them, they being indeed the great and only things that we ought to be careful of: for put all toge-

ther, they are the *one thing needful*, which our Saviour speaks of, Luke x. 42. and therefore commands us to seek them before all things else ; *Seek ye first*, saith he, *the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, Matt. vi. 33. To the same purpose is that of St. Peter, where he requires us to *give all diligence*, to use the utmost of our care, to *add to our faith, virtue ; and to virtue, knowledge ; and to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity ; and so to make our calling and election sure*, 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7, 10.

And it is very observable, that the same apostle who here commands us to *be careful for nothing*, elsewhere requires all Christians to *be careful to maintain good works*, Tit. iii. 8. and that he himself was so: for having reckoned up the many troubles he had met with in the world, he adds, *Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches*, 2 Cor. xi. 28. If St. Peter had said this, what a stir would the church of Rome have made about it ? How would they have triumphed in it, as a most infallible proof that he was Christ's vicar upon earth, the universal bishop of the whole world, who had the care of all the churches ? But it is well that it was not St. Peter, but St. Paul that said it ; and he said it only to shew how careful he was in the discharge of his apostolical office towards the whole church of Christ ; and so hath left us an undeniable argument, that he was at least as much an universal bishop as St. Peter was ; and also that we, after his example, ought to be careful to perform our whole duty in our respective places : and by consequence, that when he commands us to *be careful for nothing*, he doth not mean that we should not be careful to avoid whatsoever is offensive to God, and to do what is pleasing in his sight, to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world* : but rather that we

be so careful of such things, as to be careful of nothing else.

But here we may observe, that even in such things we may be too careful, that is, as the original word signifies, too anxious, too much distracted and divided in our thoughts about them ; as many are, who do what they can to live according to the rules of the Gospel, and yet suspect their spiritual estate ; and never thinking they can do enough, run into the contrary extreme, of doing many things which are not required at their hands. Such are they who whip, and scourge, and macerate their bodies, and so make themselves unserviceable to God and the world. And such are they also, who out of a groundless care and fear of offending God, scruple the doing of such things as he hath no where forbidden, and therefore will not be offended at their doing of them. This is the case not only of those who dissent from us, but of many good people among ourselves, who being of a fearful and melancholy temper, indulge a strange kind of nicety and scrupulosity of conscience about things in themselves indifferent : and this seems to be that which the Wise-man forbids, where he saith, *Be not righteous over-much ; neither make thyself over-wise : why shouldest thou destroy thyself ?* Eccles. vii. 16. As if he had said, be not superstitious, or over-scrupulous about such things in religion, as thou mayest or mayest not do without sin ; nor make thyself over-wise, as if thou sawest virtue or vice, where nobody else can see it : *why shouldest thou destroy thyself ?* or rather, as the word signifies, why shouldest thou stupify, astonish, or confound thyself ? For so they all do, who trouble their heads about such little things ; they do but confound and perplex their own thoughts, and take them off from the more substantial parts of religion. This therefore is that which we ought to avoid : we ought not to be too careful and solicitous about doubtful and indifferent things, but apply our minds wholly to the plain and necessary matters of the law, and trou-

ble ourselves no farther, but trust in our blessed Saviour, for the pardon of our defects, and for God's acceptance of what we do, upon the account of what he hath done and suffered for us.

But I shall speak no more of that at present, because the apostle speaks not of it in my text ; for by saying, *Be careful for nothing*, he means only that we should not be careful about temporal or earthly things ; that we should avoid those cares which our Saviour calls, *μερίμνας βιωτικὰς*, *the cares of this life*, Luke xxi. 34. and *μερίμνας τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου*, *the cares of this world*, Matt. xiii. 22.

But heré also we must take care that we do not mistake his meaning, so as to think that he would not have us take any care at all of any thing here below : for so long as we live in this world, it is absolutely necessary that we take some care about our living in it. So long as our souls are united to our bodies, we are bound by the laws of God and nature to take care of our bodies as well as souls. Our souls indeed, and their concerns, are to be regarded in the first place ; but after them, we ought to look to our bodies also, that they may want nothing that is necessary for their subsistence, so long as God shall see good to continue our souls in them. And for that purpose all who cannot well subsist without it, not only may, but ought to follow some honest trade or calling, whereby to support themselves and their families.

But because the right understanding of this may be of great use to many here present, I shall briefly give you what instructions and directions I think necessary about it, in these following propositions.

First, all are bound to follow some calling or trade, unless they have enough to live upon without it. I add this, unless they have enough to live upon without following any trade, because there are some who have great estates conveyed to them by inheritance, or by gift, from their ancestors or relations ; others, who by

God's blessing upon their own endeavours, have attained as much as is sufficient to maintain them while they are in the world, and so need not follow any trade, at least for that purpose. But such must not look upon themselves as having nothing to do in the world, for really they have as much to do, if not more, than other people: forasmuch as they who follow a trade, always know their business, their work lies before them: whereas others are forced, or at least ought to study every day what to do, and how to employ their time and their estates, so as to give a good account of them at the last day. And when they have found it out, they ought to apply their minds as seriously to it, as if their lives depended upon it; for so their eternal life doth, though not their temporal. They may perhaps live well enough without doing any thing in this world, but they cannot expect to live well in the next world without it; for their welfare there depends not upon what they have, but upon what they do here: insomuch that they who do nothing but live upon their estates, will have but little cause to be glad they had estates to live upon, when they shall hear their great Lord and Master pronounce that dreadful sentence against them, which he in the parable did against that idle servant, who did not improve, but hide his master's talent in a napkin, saying, *Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*, Matt. xxv. 30.

Wherefore they whom God hath blessed with considerable estates, or with such a competency whereby they are able to keep themselves and families without the assistance of a trade, they must have a care that they do not live idly, and to no purpose in the world, mere ciphers that signify nothing, but like the tree in the parable, which only *cumbered the ground*, and therefore was fit for nothing but to be *cut down*, and *cast into the fire*: but such persons ought rather to look upon themselves as being of an higher calling, and as having more

to do than others : they have more time to spare, and therefore should spend more in their public and private devotions ; their thoughts are freer from the cares of this world, and therefore ought to be more intent upon the next ; they need not trouble their heads about getting an estate, and therefore should be more careful how they use it ; they have commonly more than what they have real need of themselves, and therefore should give more to those who want it : in short, they have more advantages of serving and glorifying God in the world, and therefore are more obliged to do it, as they tender their own eternal welfare.

When I seriously consider these things, I cannot but sometimes wonder with myself, what should make men so eager in getting great estates for their children, when by that means they do but expose their children to greater hardships and temptations than they themselves lay under, and make it more difficult for them ever to get to heaven : our Saviour himself, by whom alone we can come thither, having told us with his own mouth, that *a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven*, Matt. xix. 23. And even in this life, all things considered, they who are forced to follow a trade, and do accordingly follow it as they ought, may live every way as comfortably, and much more safely than they. And how much soever a man hath, it is certainly his best and wisest course to have some trade or calling, or office, or at least some business, either public or private, always to do, so long as he is able, whereby he may employ his time, his parts, his learning, his strength, his interest, his estate, and whatsoever talents God hath put into his hand ; so that he may answer God's end in sending him into the world, and in bestowing such blessings upon him.

For in plain terms, God did not make man to sit still and do nothing : the first man he made, he had no sooner made him, but he immediately put him into the garden of *Eden*, to dress it, and to keep it, Gen. ii. 15.

This was the first Adam's employment, even in the state of innocence and perfection. And the second Adam too, until he entered upon his office of Mediator, followed a trade that tended to the same end; for Joseph, to whom his mother was espoused, being a *carpenter*, he himself is said to be of the same trade, Mark vi. 3. and his business was to make *ploughs* and *yokes for oxen, in order to tilling the ground*, as Justin Martyr informs us, who lived soon after him. And one reason, as the same father observes, wherefore our Lord followed that trade was, that he might teach us, ἐνεργῆ βίον, *an active life*; to avoid idleness, as the great occasion of vice and wickedness. And as our Lord hath taught us this by his example, so by his precept too: for St. Paul speaking in his name, and by the direction of his holy Spirit, laid this as a command upon the Thesalonians, and in them upon all Christians, saying, *For when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any man would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some among you which walk disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread*, 2 Thess. iii. 10, 11, 12. Where we may observe, that he reckons no man's bread his own, but what he gets by his own labour and industry. But by *bread* we are here to understand, as the word usually signifies in Scripture, *all things necessary to the support of human life*. Such things every man is obliged to provide for himself; and not only for himself, but likewise for his kindred and relations, which are not able to provide them for themselves. For the same apostle saith in another place, *If any man provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, or kindred, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*, 1 Tim. v. 8. *He hath denied the faith*, that is, he hath renounced that faith which works by love, and in effect hath apostatized from the Christian religion,

by not observing the precepts of it ; and so is as bad, nay, *worse than infidels*. For infidels, or heathens, by the very light of nature, used to take care of their parents, and children, and others that were nearly related to them. And therefore he who professes the faith of Christ, and so knows it to be his duty from the word of God himself, if he notwithstanding will not do it, he is really worse than an infidel, and will be more severely punished for it another day.

And suppose a man really hath, or thinks he hath enough for himself and family, he is not therefore discharged from his calling, so long as God gives him opportunity and strength to follow it : for that a man is bound to do, not only for his own sake, and his relations, but likewise that he may be thereby enabled to do good to others also : according to that of the apostle, *Let him that stole steal no more : but rather let him labour, working with his own hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth*, Eph. iv. 28. *To him that needeth*, i. e. any man that wants the necessaries of this life : such a one every man is bound to relieve, although he is forced to work hard to do it. And one great end which men propose to themselves in carrying on their trade, ought to be this, even that they may be in a capacity of helping and relieving such as are in want, and cannot help or relieve themselves.

But as all men are for these ends bound to follow some trade or calling ; so in the next place we must observe, that the trade or calling they follow should be lawful and honest : the thing they do should be good, as St. Paul speaks in the words before quoted. It must not be vicious in itself, nor minister occasion of vice to others : for then it is not a trade or calling, but treason or rebellion against God. But that which a man employs himself in for the purposes before mentioned, must be either commanded, or approved of, or at least allowed by the word of God. It must be some way

useful either to church or state, either to men's souls or bodies, to private persons, or to the public society in which they dwell. The calling which contributes to any such uses is lawful and good; otherwise not: for otherwise a man spends his time to ill purposes, or, which is almost as bad, to none at all.

Wherefore, as ever you desire to employ yourselves well, as becometh honest good men, you must be sure to follow such a calling as suits with the apostle's rule, where he saith, *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things*, Phil. iv. 8. For these are the things that make a calling good, profitable to a man's self, useful to the world, and acceptable to Almighty God.

In the last place, whatsoever such trade or calling a man is of, he ought to follow it with care and diligence; not to loiter away his time, and neglect his business upon every slight occasion, but always remember that his calling is the means whereby God hath designed to supply him and his with all things necessary for this life; and therefore if he neglect it, he doth not only expose himself to ruin and poverty, but he wrongs, he robs his family and poor relations of the maintenance which God hath provided for them by that means. There is no honest and lawful calling that a man is of, but, if it be not his own fault, he may live comfortably upon it, and get as much as God knows to be necessary and proper for him in his place and station; and so be as rich as he need to be in this world. But for that purpose, it is not enough that he hath a calling, but he must be diligent and industrious in it: for, as the Wiseman observes, *he becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich*, Prov. x. 4. not of itself, but because the blessing of God attends it, without which all our care and diligence will

come to nothing. But as we have no ground to expect God's blessing, except we be diligent; if we be so, we have no cause to mistrust it: for he is never wanting to any man that is not first wanting to himself.

Hence therefore I would recommend to your serious consideration and daily practice, that excellent rule of the apostle, where he commands, that *ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, that ye may walk honestly towards them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing*, 1 Thess. iv. 11, 12. He doth not say, that ye may abound in riches, purchase great estates, or advance your families, but *that ye may have lack of nothing*; which is enough in all reason; for he who lacks nothing, is as rich as he that hath all things, for he hath all things he lacks. But for this purpose, ye must *study*, first, *to be quiet*, to live peaceably with all men: and then ye must *study* likewise *to do your own business*; τὰ ἴδια, *those things which are proper to yourselves, and to your own calling*, without meddling with other men's affairs any farther than to do them all the good ye can. So that, in short, whatsoever trade, calling, office, or employment a man is of, it is his duty to mind it; and to mind it also with care and diligence, that by God's blessing upon it, he may be able to maintain himself and his family by it.

And therefore, when the apostle in my text saith, *be careful for nothing*, he cannot be so understood, as if he forbad us to use all due care and diligence, every one in his own particular calling: for this would be to forbid that in this place, which he himself elsewhere, and the Scriptures all along command.

But what then doth he here forbid? He forbids in general, that over-carefulness, solicitude, and anxiety of mind, about the things of this life, which many, too many, are subject to; who never thinking they shall have enough, and always fearing, that notwithstanding all their care, they shall come to want; their minds are

distracted, their thoughts trouble them, their hearts are divided and rent as it were in pieces, casting this way, and that way, and every way, and yet know not which way to take ; like a troubled sea, tossed to and fro with every wind that blows : whatsoever happens, they have no peace, no rest, or quiet in themselves : if they lose never so little, they think presently they are undone ; if they get never so much, unless it be as much as they expected, it is all one : they moil, and toil ; they rise up early, and sit up late, and eat their bread with carefulness ; and all for fear they should have none to eat : how much soever God hath given them at present, they dare not trust him for the future ; and therefore are still bustling about to provide for themselves as well as they can. If they be in any strait, they think of every thing how to get out, except him who alone can help them. If they seem to be in any danger, though it be never so remote, it strikes them to the heart, and puts them into an hurry and confusion. If they have any business more than ordinary upon their hands, they stretch their brains to the highest pitch, till they come to their wits' end, how to do it to the best advantage for themselves. By which means they live as it were in a maze or labyrinth, not knowing which way to go, and yet running about as if they did. In short, they live as without God in the world, or at least without any trust or dependence upon him : and therefore, as if they were their own carvers, they bend their minds wholly to take care of themselves, and of all their concerns in this life, without ever looking up to him to direct and assist them in it.

This is that carefulness which the apostle here forbids : and not only the height of it, as I have now described it, but every degree of it, and every such indisposition or distemper of mind as tends towards it.

And you will not wonder that he should forbid it, when you consider the vanity, the trouble, the sinfulness, and the mischiefs of it : which I shall therefore put you

in mind of, that ye may more fully understand the nature of it, and also be better armed against it for the future.

The vanity of it appears sufficiently, in that our carefulness is all to no purpose, about the things of this life; for after all, they are wholly at God's disposal. He gives, and takes, and doth what he will with them. He measures them out to all as he sees good, and it is not in our power either to direct or hinder him. This is the argument which our Lord himself makes use of, to shew the vanity of all worldly cares, saying, *Which of you by taking care can add one cubit to his stature, or age,* Matt. vi. 27. And as for our thoughtfulness about what we shall eat, or drink, or wear, he there shews that God feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field most gorgeously, without their care or labour; and therefore men being much better than they, have no cause to doubt but he will provide all things necessary for them, without their being so careful and solicitous about it; and by consequence, all their carefulness and solicitude must needs be in vain, and to no purpose, ver. 25, 26, 28, 30. Neither is this only a great vanity, but, as the Wise-man speaks, it is *vexation of spirit too*. It is a great trouble and disquietness to our minds, to be always upon the rack, distorted and distracted with cares and fears, as the men of this world commonly are, *piercing themselves through with many sorrows*, as the apostle observes, 1 Tim. vi. 10. and so making their own lives very uneasy and troublesome, always tormenting their heads, and their hearts too, with excessive solicitude, either how to get more, or else to keep what they have got. And as if they had not trouble enough at present, they will trouble themselves too about what is future; and grieve to-day, because they may have occasion to do so to-morrow. This is that which our blessed Saviour forewarns us against, saying, *Take no thought, or be not careful, for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the*

things of itself. *Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof,* Matt. vi. 34. As if he had said, Every day brings care and trouble enough along with it; and it is sufficient that you bear and manage it aright as it comes. But do not anticipate troubles, and make yourselves miserable now, because ye may be so anon. Be not thoughtful about what may, or may not happen hereafter: for this will not prevent or alleviate, but aggravate and hasten your troubles; as they find by woful experience, who concern themselves too much about future events.

And it would be well if there was nothing else but trouble in it. But alas! this excessive carefulness and anxiety of mind about the worldly things, is sinful as well as troublesome. It is expressly forbidden by Almighty God in my text, and in many other places of Scripture; and it is always accompanied with, or rather it proceeds from, one of the greatest sins a man can be guilty of, even unbelief, or at least want of faith and trust in God: as our Saviour intimates, where, arguing against it, he saith, *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?* Matt. vi. 30. They must needs be of little faith indeed, if any at all, who are solicitous about such things as God hath promised to give them, without their being so; and therefore mistrust his promises as well as break his laws, and so are guilty of a double sin, in every single act of such excessive thoughtfulness about any thing in this world.

But who is able to reckon up, or describe the many and great mischiefs which attend this sin? I shall not undertake to do that; but shall only put you in mind of some of them, which, if duly considered, will make you beware of it, and dread the thoughts of ever falling into it, much more of living in it.

First therefore, it is this carefulness for the world that hinders and keeps you off from performing your

duty unto God. So long as your minds are so intent about the things of this life, it is impossible that you should love, fear, or trust in God, or serve and honour him as you ought to do: no, ye have other business to mind than what he hath set you. And therefore, although ye have never so many opportunities of performing your devotions to him, ye can find no time, or rather, ye cannot find it in your hearts to do it; your thoughts being wholly taken up with other affairs, of a different and quite contrary nature.

This our Saviour himself noted in Martha. She and her sister Mary keeping house together, our Lord was pleased to honour them with his company. Martha being mightily pleased, as well she might, with his company, was very careful and busy about providing for his entertainment, or, as the text saith, *was cumbered about much serving*: while Mary in the mean time sat at Jesus's feet, hearing his divine discourses. Upon which, Martha, having more upon her hands than she could well do, desired our Lord to bid her sister come and help her. But instead of that, our Lord said to her, *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled with many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her*, Luke x. 41, 42. If it ever can be lawful to be cumbered with worldly business, it must needs be so upon such an extraordinary occasion, when they had got so divine a guest in their house. Yet we see our Saviour plainly reproves Martha for her over-carefulness, even upon that occasion, because it hindered her from attending, as her sister did, to his doctrine. And I fear there be many among us, who upon slighter occasions neglect the service of God; being so *careful and troubled about many things*, that they never think of *the one thing needful*, except perhaps upon the Lord's day, when they cannot mind the world, and so have nothing else to do. For we find by sad experience, that upon the week-days, when you can follow your

worldly business, our churches are empty, and God's service neglected. Which is a plain demonstration, that your over-carefulness for this life, hinders you from taking any care at all of the next.

Neither doth this hinder you only from serving God, but it hinders you also in the doing of it. For so long as your minds are distracted about the world, it is impossible you should serve God without distraction ; as Christ himself saith, *No man can serve two masters : ye cannot serve God and mammon*, Matt. vi. 24. Ye cannot possibly be intent upon two things at the same time, and especially upon things so directly opposite to one another, as God and the world. And therefore so long as your thoughts are wholly taken up with the things of this life, as they commonly are, it is no wonder that ye cannot keep them close to any duty ye perform to God. But in the midst of your most solemn devotions, public or private, worldly thoughts will still be crowding in, and spoil all ye do. From whence ye may see the reason why there are so few in the world that serve God at all, and much fewer that serve him well : most being such as the prophet speaks of, who *come before God as the people cometh, and sit before him as his people, and with their mouth shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness*, Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

And as this disturbs men in doing their duty, so it deprives them of all the benefit and comfort which they might receive from what they do ; and makes the means of grace ineffectual and useless. For this ye have Christ's own observation and word ; who, in the parable of the sower, saith, *He that receiveth seed among thorns is he that heareth the word ; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful*, Matt. xiii. 22. From whence ye may see the great cause, why men in this age hear so much, and practise so little ; even because whatsoever you hear, the cares of this world immediately put it out of your thoughts. You never think any

more of it, and then it is no wonder that ye are never the wiser or better for it.

And yet this is not all neither: for this excessive carefulness about the things of this life, doth not only hinder you from doing or receiving good, but it exposeth you to all manner of sin and wickedness. The Wise-man tells you, that *he that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent*, Prov. xxviii. 20. And St. Paul to the same purpose; *they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*, 1 Tim. vi. 9. And you cannot but all observe the same of all manner of worldly cares; how they put men upon envy and hatred, upon wrath and fury, strife and contention with one another; upon lying, swearing, and perjury; upon oppression and extortion; upon cheating, stealing, and robbing upon the high-way: yea, upon going to the devil himself, and consulting him and his agents about their worldly concerns.

This I rather mention in a more particular manner, because I have heard there are some in this city, as well as elsewhere, who, if they have lost any thing, or would know something of their friends beyond sea, or of their future state in this world, presently go to those which they call astrologers, wizards, conjurors, or the like, to be informed about it; which is plainly going to the devil for it. For whether those kind of people they go to deal with him or no, they who go to them consult them as if they did, and so are co-partners with them in their wickedness, whatsoever it is, whether it be real witchcraft and sorcery, or only confederacy and cheat. And therefore, as by the law of Moses a *witch* was not *suffered to live*, Exod. xxii. 18. so in the same law God hath expressly commanded, that none shall *seek after*, nor so much as *regard wizards, or such as have familiar spirits*, Lev. xix. 31. And if any do so, he saith, that he will *set his face against them, and cut them off from his people*, Lev. xx. 3. And indeed it is

very rare, but God inflicts some remarkable judgment upon those who consult such as exercise, or pretend to that which they call the *black art*. And if they happen to escape in this life, they will smart more severely for it in the next ; it being one of the greatest sins that a man can be guilty of : it is a kind of apostacy, a leaving God to go to the devil ; and all from excessive carefulness about something in this world ; which is plainly the only cause that puts silly people upon such wicked practices as these are.

I shall add to these only one more of the many mischiefs which arise from the same cause ; and that is the same which Christ himself puts you in mind of, where he saith, *Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares*, Luke xxi. 34. Where ye see he who who will be your Judge, being desirous that you should not be surprised, or taken unawares, hath forewarned you, that the cares of this life will make you as unfit to appear before him, as surfeiting and drunkenness itself. Which when I sometimes consider with myself, I cannot but pity those who go out of this world, as many I fear do, in the midst of worldly cares, and by consequence as unfit to die, as they who are downright drunk. And therefore must beg of you always to remember your Saviour's words, and take heed that your hearts be not overcharged with the cares of this life, lest ye die too in that condition, and so be miserable for ever.

But you will say perhaps, what would you have us do ? Would you not have us to mind our trade ? Yes, by all means ; you are bound in conscience to do it, as I shewed before. It is your duty to mind every one his own calling in this world, while ye live in it. But it is also your duty to mind God, and that world where ye must live for ever. And although you ought to use all due care and diligence about your trade, as if ye were to live by it, yet ye must not be so careful and anxious

about it, as if you could live by that without God's blessing upon it; which you can have no ground to expect, if your minds be more intent upon that, than upon him in whom you live, and from whom, after all, you must receive it, or else have nothing to live on. And therefore if you would follow your trades as becometh Christians, you must be diligent and industrious in them; but you must not be fearful and solicitous about the event and success of them, but leave that wholly and solely to God, trusting and depending upon him to give you that success, which he in his infinite wisdom knows to be best for you; and trouble your heads no more about it. This you will find to be not only the most easy and comfortable way of living and trading in the world, but likewise the most effectual course you can take, never to want any thing that is necessary or good for you. For God himself will provide all such things for you, if you trust upon him for it.

This holds good, not only as to your trading and trafficking in the world for a livelihood, but likewise as to all the changes and chances of this mortal life. Whatsoever danger you fear, whatsoever strait or difficulty you are in, you must not suffer your minds to be disturbed or distracted about it; but lift up your hearts to God, and commit yourselves and your affairs all to him, and then he will be sure to take care of you, so as either to bring you out of your straits, or, which is better, turn them to your advantage. For this you have his own word, where he saith, *Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you*, 1 Pet. v. 7. And again, *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall not suffer the righteous to be moved*, Psal. lv. 22. And elsewhere, *Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall*

give thee the desire of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass, Psal. xxxvii. 3, 4, 5. There are many such promises in holy Scripture, whereby we are fully assured, that if we use the means for attaining any thing that is truly good for us, and be not over-careful about them, but trust in God for his blessing upon them, we shall certainly attain the thing we aimed at, or something better.

This is the more to be observed here, because it will help us to understand the latter part of my text, where the apostle having said, *Be careful for nothing*, adds, *but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.* *Be made known unto God*, may ye say? Doth not God know them before? Yes, certainly: but as a father knows his child wants such and such things, and yet will not give him them, till he hath asked them of him; so God knows, as our Saviour saith, *that we have need of these things*, the things of this life; but before he gives them, he will have us make known, and acknowledge our want of them to him, and pray to him for them, to signify our dependence upon him, and our obligation to him for what we have. Concerning which there are three things observable in my text.

First, that as we are to *be careful for nothing*, we ought to *pray for every thing: in every thing*, saith the apostle, great or small. Whatsoever it is we want, we must request it of God.

Secondly, to our prayers and supplications we must always add thanksgiving: thankfulness for what we have, being the best means whereby to obtain what we want. And then,

Lastly, this is all the apostle would have us do in every thing, in every condition, in every circumstance of our whole life; even *by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make known our requests to God*; and when we have done that, he would have us

trouble ourselves no more about any thing, but leave all to God, with a sure trust and confidence that he, according to his promise, will grant our requests which we have made known to him, so far as he knows it to be good for us. This is the course he would have us take upon all occasions. And he that takes this course, need be careful for nothing, for he will have God himself to take care of all things for him: as we may see in many instances.

When Jehosaphat was in a great strait, by reason of vast armies that were coming against him, he made known his case to God, saying, *We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee*, 2 Chron. xx. 12. He prayed, and trusted in God, who therefore fought for him, making his enemies destroy one another.

When Nebuchadnezzar had threatened the three children, that they should be thrown into a fiery furnace, unless they would worship the image which he had set up, they were so far from being solicitous, as most people would have been about such a matter as concerned their lives, that they plainly told him, *We are not careful to answer thee in this matter: if it be so, as thou speakest, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king*, Dan. iii. 16, 17. They were not careful about it, but trusted in God, who therefore sent his angel to deliver them. This is the rule which Christ prescribed to his disciples in all the troubles they were likely to meet with, saying, *When they shall deliver you up, take no thought, be not careful, how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak*, Matt. x. 19. If ever they might be careful, it might be upon such occasions; but even upon such occasions as those our Lord would have them take no thought about it, but only trust in the promise which he made them. I can-

not omit that remarkable instance of St. Paul and Silas, who being in prison, were so far from being thoughtful how to get out, that *at midnight they prayed, and sang praises to God*; upon which, the *prison doors were opened, their bands loosed*, and next morning they were both released, Acts xvi.

There are many such instances in Scripture, of God's particular care of those who trust on him. And though these may seem extraordinary, and ye cannot expect that he should now work miracles for you; yet if you will but make trial of it, ye will find him still both able and ready to assist and help you upon all occasions, by his ordinary providence, as effectually as if it was extraordinary and miraculous.

This therefore is that which I would now advise you to. Whatsoever business ye have upon your hands, how great and difficult soever it may seem, do not stretch your thoughts, be not careful about it, but do what you think at present to be best, and apply yourselves to God, believing, and trusting on him, for his direction and assistance; and then ye will find that all will be well, far better than your solicitude and thoughtfulness can make it. For then God himself will take the business into his own hands. As ye depend upon him for it, he will concern himself in it. He will direct your thoughts to the best means, and assist and bless you in the use of them. He will keep off every thing that may any way impede or hinder it. He will order all things relating to it, so as to make them concur to the effecting of it. And if you thus always cast your care upon him, he will always take care of you. He will instruct you by his wisdom, he will guide you by his counsel, he will assist you by his grace, he will sanctify and comfort you by his holy Spirit, he will strengthen and protect you by his almighty power, and at last receive you to himself in glory, through the merits of his only Son: *to whom, &c.*

S E R M O N CXIV.

THE GREAT DUTY OF LOVING GOD.

MATT. xxii. 37, 38.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

ALL that have any true sense of God upon their minds, cannot but express it by doing something which they think may please him ; and seeing they can never do it without keeping his commandments, therefore they offer at that. But such is the weakness of our corrupt nature, that there are but few that strive, or so much as think of keeping all his commandments, but most men take up with few of them, and such commonly as are of the least weight. The Pharisees themselves, the strictest sect in all the Jewish religion, they paid tithe of *mint, and anise, and cummin, but omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith* ; as the Lawgiver himself told them ; and then said, *these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*, Matt. xxiii. 23. whereby he hath signified his divine will, that none of his commandments should be slighted or neglected, but that all should be observed, one as well as another. And yet notwithstanding there are some weightier than others, which he would have us take special care to observe. This the Jews themselves

seem to be sensible of, so as to dispute among themselves which should be esteemed the greatest commandment in the law : some thinking that circumcision, others the sabbath ; some that the paying of tithes and offerings, others that the sacrifices were most strictly commanded, and therefore that the commandments about them were most necessary to be observed. And not agreeing among themselves about it, one of them, being a scribe or lawyer, whose business it was to search into the true meaning of the law, propounded the question to our blessed Saviour, *tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great, or greatest, commandment in the law ?* He little thought that he spake to the Lawgiver himself, and therefore did not expect such an answer as he received. For Jesus said unto him, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* Which being the oracle or answer of God himself to a question put to him concerning his own law, deserves to be particularly considered by all that really desire to observe it.

But I cannot but first take notice of two things in general, concerning the answers which our blessed Saviour made to the questions which the Jews propounded to him. The first is, that although their questions were usually propounded out of a very ill design, even to entangle him in his talk, that they might have something whereof they *might accuse* him ; yet he took no notice of that, but gave them such answers, as are of general and perpetual use to his church. So that we could not have been without any one of them ; but have infinite cause to thank God for the very captious questions that were propounded to him, and the gracious answers he was pleased to return to them : whereby we may see his divine wisdom and power, in bringing good out of evil.

The other thing to be observed is, that whatsoever question they propounded to our Saviour, he gave them so full and satisfactory an answer to it, that they never had any thing to reply upon it, but went away with wonder and amazement. When he was but twelve years old, as he was sitting among the rabbies or doctors at Jerusalem, *both hearing them, and asking them questions ; all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers*, Luke ii. 47. So it was all his life after. We need not go far for instances. In this very chapter, he answered the Pharisees' question about paying tribute to Cesar, so that *when they had heard his words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way*, ver. 22. And when the Sadducees put a question to him about the resurrection of the dead, he gave them so clear a solution of it, as did not only put them to silence, but *when the multitude heard it, they were astonished at his doctrine*, ver. 33, 34. And when one of the scribes or lawyers perceived that he had answered both the Pharisees and Sadducees so well, as to put them to silence, he also propounded a question, this great question to him, *Which is the first commandment of all?* And our Lord gave him so full and clear an answer to it, that he immediately confessed the truth of what he said, saying, *Well, Master, thou hast said the truth. For there is one God, and there is none other but he. And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices*, Mark xii. 32, 33. By this it seems their sacrifices were esteemed, at least by some, as the chief part of their law. But this lawyer had no sooner heard our Saviour's solution of his question, but he was convinced of the contrary, and was forced to own that all their burnt-offerings and sacrifices, put them all together, how many soever they were, they still came short of a man's loving God with all his heart, and his neighbour as him-

self; that this was indeed the great commandment of all; as our Lord told him, and ordered it to be recorded, that all may know it.

And indeed, this which our Lord here calls the *first and great commandment* in the law, is intimated to be so in the law itself, where it is written, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might*, Deut. vi. 4, 5. where we see this commandment proclaimed, with a preface proper and peculiar to itself, and such a one as requires a special regard to be had to it. *Hear, O Israel.* And in the Hebrew, the last letter of the first word is greater than ordinary, to shew that there is something extraordinary in this commandment, and that it is indeed, as our Saviour here calls it, the great commandment in the law. And besides, this preface contains the substance of all that we ought to believe concerning God, as the commandment doth our whole duty to him. *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.* He is the *Lord, Jehovah*, Being or Essence itself, existing in and of himself, and giving both essence and existence to all things else. And he is our God. The original word is of the plural number, denoting the Trinity of the divine Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: all and every one of which is here said to be our God. The Father is our God, and our Father: the Son, our God, and our Saviour: the Holy Ghost, our God, and our Sanctifier. All which supposeth and implies our reconciliation to God by the death of Christ, without which we could not have had him to be our God. But lest we should think that the three divine Persons, signified by that plural name *Elohim*, are so many several Gods, it followeth, *our God is one Lord, one Jehovah*, or simply *One*, (with a great letter also :) which needed not to be added, if no more than one divine Person had been signified by it; the unity of the Godhead being sufficiently declared by

his name *Jehovah*, Being in general, which can be but one. So that the addition of the word *one*, is an undeniable argument, that a Trinity of Persons is implied in the foresaid name, and that it is the will of God that we should believe him to be *three Persons*, and *one Jehovah, one God*; and that the Jews repeating, as they anciently did, these words every day, did thereby profess their belief of the Trinity in unity, although they did not understand it so well as we now do by the light of the Gospel.

The foundation of our faith in Almighty God being thus laid down in these words, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, or divine Persons, is one Lord*; the great duty to be built upon it is subjoined in the words immediately following: *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might*. This is that which our great Lord and Master Jesus Christ hath taught us to be the *first and great commandment*. And therefore we must be sure to learn and practise this, as ever we desire to shew ourselves to be his scholars or disciples indeed. For which purpose it will be necessary to consider the true meaning and extent of this commandment; what great reason it is grounded upon; wherefore it is called the *first and great commandment*; and how happy they are who keep it. Unto which few heads, all that is necessary to be known concerning it, may be easily reduced.

First therefore, by the *Lord thy God*, as I have already observed from the original, is here meant that almighty Being, *Jehovah*, which made, preserves, and governs the whole world, and hath revealed itself in the holy Scriptures to be three in one; *the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, these three are one*, 1 John v. 7 that is, as it is here expressed, *one Jehovah, one Lord*. And therefore as we are here commanded to love *Jehovah*, or the divine Essence in general, so we are commanded to love each of the divine Persons alike. And as they are all of one and the same nature, we must

have the same affection for one that we have for the other. *For all should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him,* John v. 23. So he that doth not love the Son begotten of the Father, doth not love the Father that begot him. And he that doth not love the Holy Ghost, that proceedeth from the Father and the Son, doth not love either the Father or the Son, from whom he proceedeth. Wherefore, that our faith and love to God may be such as he hath commanded, it must be equally fixed upon each of these divine Persons, not as so many several Gods, but as being all one and the same God, blessed for ever.

Neither are we here commanded to love him only as he is the Lord, but likewise as he is our God. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God:* not thy Jehovah; for that word never hath any adjunct, or pronoun, or any thing else affixed to it: but *thy God*, or the divine Persons, as he made thee, saves thee, and sanctifies thee; and so is the Author both of thy being and well-being: according to the covenant that he hath made with us, saying, *I will be their God, and they shall be my people,* Jer. xxxi. 33. And as he is thus in a peculiar manner related to us, we ought accordingly to love him with all our hearts. How we must do that, comes next to be considered.

What it is to love in general, we know by experience better than by any definition or description that can be given of it. For when we apprehend a thing to be good and agreeable to us, or any way convenient or profitable for us, we feel our hearts moving as it were towards it, being sensibly touched with a liking of it, and a good will to it; with complacency and delight in it if it be present with us, and if it be at any distance from us, with such desires and longings for it, as put us upon reaching at it, and labouring all we can after it. Thus people are commonly affected towards something or other in this world, because they apprehend it to be

good for them. But such apprehensions being raised in them only by their fancy or imagination, the affection that is moved by them depends in a great measure upon the temper and humours of the body; and therefore hath little or nothing in it like that love which we ought to have for God. For we are commanded *to love him with all our hearts, with all our soul, and with all our mind*. Whether these three terms, the *heart*, the *soul*, and the *mind*, be here used to denote so many distinct faculties in the soul, as some have thought, it is not material to enquire. Be sure they all together signify, that true love to God is seated wholly in the soul; without depending at all upon the body, or sensitive part, as the love of other things doth. It is not our fancy, but our reason or understanding, that represents Almighty God to us as the chiefest good. And when we accordingly choose and embrace him as such, then we are truly said to love him: and to love him with all our heart; when our whole soul is thus inclined to him, and all our affections meet in him, as in their proper centre, and cleave so fast to him, that nothing is able to get them off, or remove them from him; all things else seeming, as they are, even as nothing at all in comparison of him.

This is true love to God indeed. Neither can any man be said to love him at all, that doth not thus love him with all his heart, so as to love nothing above him, nothing equal to him, nothing at all in comparison of him. Let us hear what he himself saith, *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me*, Matt. x. 37. The love of children to parents, especially that of parents to children, is the truest and strongest love that men can have to any thing upon earth; it is strictly commanded also by God, and implanted in our very nature: and yet it seems by this saying of our Lord, that if a child loves his parents, or a parent his children, more than God, he is not worthy

to be reckoned among those who love God at all. Elsewhere he goes much higher, saying, *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and his brethren, and sisters, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*, Luke xiv. 26. which is not to be so understood, as if he would have us absolutely hate such near relations, which he himself elsewhere commands us to love; but that we should love him so much above them, that our love to them should appear as hatred rather than love, in comparison of that which we have for him: so that if we be brought into such a strait, that we cannot do it to both, but must shew our love either to God, or to the nearest relations we have in the world, we must regard them no more than as if we hated them, but with an holy scorn throw them out of our thoughts, as not worthy to come into competition with him that made them. When we thus love God above all things in the world besides, howsoever near or dear they may be unto us, so as to be able, without any long pause, to part with any thing for his sake; then, and not till then, we may be truly said to love him *with all our hearts*.

But when this sacred fire of divine love is thus kindled in a man's breast, it is not confined there, but breaks forth immediately, and shews itself in his thoughts, in his affections, in his words, and in all the actions of his life. For when a man thus loves God with all his heart, he cannot but be always thinking of him, (as all people do upon those they love,) and contemplating upon those divine perfections which so forcibly attract his heart unto them, that it is always restless and unquiet, until it be fixed entirely upon them. And therefore, although he could see all the kingdoms of the earth, and all the glory of them, at one view, he would find nothing there to bound his desires, but they would still be carried higher, and higher still, and never rest till they get to him whom his soul loves: as we see in David, crying out, *Whom have I in heaven, O God, but thee? and*

there is none upon earth I desire besides thee, Psal. lxxiii. 25. And when the soul is thus upon the wing, flying up to heaven, and there looking upon Almighty God as his God and Saviour, it cannot but rejoice *with joy unspeakable, and full of glory*. So that, whether the man hath or hath not any thing else, it is all one, he can still say and sing with the prophet, *Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation*, Hab. iii. 18. and with the blessed Virgin, *My soul doth magnify the Lord, my heart rejoiceth in God my Saviour*. For as all are apt to praise and magnify those they love, much more they who truly love God, are always magnifying and praising him, and never think they can do enough ; as really they never can.

And as all men desire to be loved by those they love ; so they who love God above all things, desire above all things to be beloved of him : which that they may, they strive all they can to please him : and seeing they can never do that without doing what he would have them, therefore they make it their chief care to walk *in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless* ; particularly, such as require them to *love their neighbours*, and to *do good to all men, especially to such as are of the household of faith* : without which, they have no ground to pretend any love to God : for *if a man say, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God, love his brother also*, 1 John iv. 20, 21. Indeed, all that truly love God, cannot choose but love those who are made in his image and likeness ; as all men are. But *love is the fulfilling of the law*, as the apostle saith, Rom. xiii. 10. And Christ himself here saith, that *all the law and the prophets hang upon these two*, even for a man to *love God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself*, Matt. xxii. 40. Seeing therefore they who love God, cannot choose but love their neighbour

for his sake ; and seeing they who love God and their neighbour, will keep the whole law ; therefore all who do not make it their constant duty to keep the whole law of God, may be confident they do not love him : but they who do so, need not doubt of their love to him. For he himself assureth them of it, saying, *He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me*, John xiv. 21. Such a one shews that he loves God with all his heart, seeing his whole heart is set to keep his commandments, and to do all such things as please him ; notwithstanding all the temptations and allurements that he meets with to the contrary : which he could not do, if he did not love God above all things else, as all must do, that would love him with all their hearts.

And if we enquire into the reasons of this the first and great commandment, they also are so great, that they command us to keep it in the first place. Neither need we go from the command itself to search for them : for we are here commanded, first, to love him as he is the Lord ; *Thou shalt love the Lord, Jehovah*. But as such, he is the chiefest, or rather the only good in the world : as our blessed Saviour himself saith, *There is none good but one, that is God*, Matt. xix. 17. There is none essentially, none originally, none infinitely good, but he. Goodness in his very essence, so that he is not only good, but goodness itself, in and of himself, and the origin of all the goodness that is in any thing besides him. It all flows from him as from its fountain. I know there are many other good things in the world, yea, all things that he made are good, every thing in its kind. For when he had made the world, it is said, *and God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good*, Gen. i. 31. But it was he that made it so. Wherefore, seeing all the goodness or excellency there is in any or all the creatures in the world was put into them by Jehovah, the almighty Creator of them, there is all the reason in the world that we should love

him above them all; the sun more than the beams that proceed out of it, the fountain more than the streams that flow from it.

Especially considering, that whatsoever goodness can be supposed to be in any particular creature, can be no more than a particular goodness, which may do us good in one respect, or upon one occasion, not upon all, as God doth. And all the goodness that is in all the creatures in the whole world, in that it is confined to them, it cannot be any more than a limited and finite goodness, and therefore cannot possibly be the proper and adequate object of our affections. For though we had all things that God hath made, we should still desire more; the desires of our souls being in a manner infinite: so that whatsoever we have besides God, our desires still run farther and farther *ad infinitum*, and can never rest or be satisfied but in an infinite good; such as none but God is. But he is such an infinite good, that there is nothing that our souls can desire but they may have it in him, and infinitely more. Wherefore, if we would govern our affections by the rules of right reason, seeing we love nothing but under the notion of good; we must love him most that is the greatest good: and seeing he is so infinitely better than all things else, that nothing can be truly termed good in comparison of him: we ought to love nothing at all in comparison of him. And whatsoever love we may pretend to have for him, we cannot be properly said to love him at all, any farther than as we love him above all things in the world besides.

Thus, if we contemplate only upon God's essential goodness, our reason cannot but dictate to us, that we ought to love him with all our hearts, for what he is in himself. But that nothing might be wanting to draw our whole hearts unto him, and to fix them entirely upon him, as he is infinitely good in himself, he hath been, and still is, as infinitely good to us. As I should now shew. But who is able to do that? Who can

measure the height, the depth, the length, and breadth of God's love to mankind? And to us also who least deserve it? The highest of our thoughts can never reach it. *Who then can express the noble acts of the Lord, or shew forth all his praise, and declare the wonders that he doth for the children of men?* It is impossible for tongue of men or angels to do it.

But although we cannot fully comprehend, much less express the greatness of God's love and goodness to us, yet if we do but cast our eye upon it, we may easily perceive so much of it, as will make us reflect and look upon ourselves as infinitely obliged to love him with all our hearts. And that we both may and ought to love him so for what he is to us, as well as for what he is in himself, appears from the command itself, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*: not only as he is *the Lord*, but likewise as he is *thy God*. And he hath manifested himself to be so in such a wonderful manner, that we can never sufficiently adore and love him for it.

For as he is our God, every Person in the most sacred Trinity hath engaged our affections to him by such expressions of his divine love to us, that if we had ten thousand hearts apiece, and loved him with them all, we could never love him enough; but should be still crying out with David, *I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn also of my salvation, and my high tower*, Psal. xviii. 1, 2. He is our all, therefore we will love him with all our hearts.

God the Father Almighty, he is our Maker, our Preserver, our daily, our continual Benefactor. It is in him we live, and move, and have our being. It is from him that we receive every good thing we have, and it is by him that we are preserved from every evil thing we have not. It is he that both makes and gives us our meat and drink, and causeth it to nourish, refresh, and strengthen our bodies, we know not how. It is he that

prevents our falling into trouble, or else supports us under it, and delivers us out of it. It is he that protects us from the malice of our enemies, or turns their hearts, and makes them become our friends. Whatsoever kindness we receive from others, it is both the effect and token of his kindness to us, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands; and ours among the rest. It is by him that we think, understand, reason, and discern between good and evil, and choose and love the one before the other. What infinite cause then have we to love him above all things, without whom we could neither have any thing to love, nor love any thing we have?

But *in this*, above all, *was manifested the love of God towards us, because God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*, 1 John iv. 9, 10. He sent his Son, his only-begotten Son, begotten of himself, so that he also is the one living and true God. For *hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us*, 1 John iii. 16. God laid down his life, he laid it down for us: which is such an abyss of love, that the angels desire to look into it, but can never see to the bottom of it. How well then may we stand still and wonder? We, to whom this incomprehensible, this infinite, this divine love was shewn, what can we do less, than throw our hearts all in a flame at the feet of him that hath shewn it to us?

That the Lord God omnipotent, who reigns over the universal world, that he should take upon him our flesh; that he who made man in the likeness of himself, should himself be made in the likeness of men; and that he, as such, should become obedient to death, even the death of the cross, and all to redeem us from it, by expiating the sins which we have committed against himself! how can we think of this, and our hearts not burn within us? *Greater love hath no man than this, that*

a man lay down his life for his friends, John xv. 13. But behold infinitely greater love than any mere man can shew! for God himself laid down his life, and he laid it down, not for his friends, but for his enemies, and all that they might become his friends, and love him with all their hearts. And shall we not do it after all? God forbid!

God forbid, but that we should love him above all the good things we have, seeing it is by him only that any good thing we have is good for us. For upon our fall from the state in which God made us, the whole earth and all things upon it are cursed to us; and nothing can do us good, so long as he who made and governs all things is displeased with us. But *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*, Gal. iii. 13. And so hath restored us to the favour of God, and keeps us in it, upon our believing and trusting upon him for it.

For he, the eternal Son of God, having taken upon him the nature of man in general, and united it to his own divine Person, and then offered it up as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, by dying in their stead, he in the same nature went up to heaven, and hath been ever since, and now is there at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, *ever living to make intercession* for those who come unto God by him, Heb. vii. 25. And it is only by means of this intercession which he is continually making for us, that Almighty God is reconciled to us, and hath mercy upon us; that he pardons our offences, and accounts us righteous; that he accepts of our sincere endeavours to serve him, notwithstanding our manifold imperfections; that he looks upon us as his children, and provides accordingly for us; that he preserves us from danger and mischief, and gives us all things necessary both for life and godliness: so that as the light and heat that we have upon earth proceeds from the sun in the firmament; so all the blessings and favours we enjoy, come from the Sun of righteousness

shining continually in heaven, even from the eternal Son of God, our only Mediator and Advocate with the Father: *whom therefore having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory*, 1 Pet. i. 8. And well might the apostle say, *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maran-atha*, 1 Cor. xvi. 22. that is, let him be cursed in the highest degree that can be. For that man must needs be so, who loves not him that is the fountain of all blessing, without whom no man ever had, or can have, one thing that is truly good for him: whereas by him, there is nothing that can either make us, or do us good, but we may all have it abundantly.

By him the Holy Ghost himself, the greatest good that we are capable of, *is abundantly shed upon us*, Tit. iii. 5, 6. The Holy Ghost, the third Person in the most glorious Trinity, of one substance with the Father and the Son, he also doth not only come in a special manner to us, but rests upon us, and abides continually with us, and in us, as a principle of another kind of light and life, far above what we have or can have by nature. For by nature we have only senses to discern the things of this world, and reason to govern us in the use of them. As to the things of the other world, we can have no right perception, much less any relish of them, but by the Holy Spirit of God, revealing them to us in his word, and assisting us in apprehending and affecting of them. It is he that enlightens our minds, to see the things that belong to our everlasting peace, and opens our hearts to receive them. It is he that directs us what to do, and assists us in doing what is required, in order to our obtaining of them. It is he that informs our judgments, that purifies our hearts, that awakens our consciences, that brings our passions into order, and keeps them in it. In short, it is the holy Spirit of God that makes us holy and spiritual, like in our capacities

to himself, partakers of his divine nature; working in us both to will and to do what God would have us, in such a manner as plainly shews it to be supernatural and divine; the work of God himself: who expects no more, and we can do no less, than love him for it. And the more we love him, the more we are bound to do it; that also being the effect of his love to us. So that turn our eyes which way we will, either to the good we have, or to the good we do, they still bring us in fresh matter to fill our hearts with love to God, so as to leave no room for any thing else to enter. But the more we think of him, the more we love him, the more we may, and the more we ought, as we are here commanded, *to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our mind.* This our Lord here saith *is the first and great commandment.* It is the *first*, being the same in effect with that, *Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.* For what a man loves most, that is his God: and therefore he that loves any thing more than Almighty God, hath another God before him. It is the *first* in practice; for all true obedience being grounded upon true love to God, he that doth not *first* love God *with all his heart*, can obey none of his commandments as he ought to do it. It is the *first* in dignity: it is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices, more than all the other services we can do for God; so that all other signify nothing without this: which is therefore also the great commandment; the greatest of all: all the rest resolving themselves into this, and meeting at last in it. He that doth not love God with all his heart, can keep none of his commandments: he that doth, will keep them all to the utmost of his power. And where he is deficient, this makes it up. This covers a multitude of faults. This adorns and sets off all we do, and puts such a gloss upon it, that although it be not perfect in itself, yet it is acceptable to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And therefore it may be well called, as it is

here by him that made the *whole law*, the *first* and *great commandment* in it.

These things being thus premised, let me now bespeak your love for the Lord your God: not such a love as you have for other things, but that which is due to him above all things else; so as to love him *with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind*, with the purest, the strongest, the highest love, that your heart, your soul, or your mind is capable of at the utmost stretch. And never fear any excess in it, for it can have only one extreme, and that is defect. So that ye may lay it down as a certain rule, that ye cannot love the world too little, nor God too much. And seeing you can never love him more than ye ought, you ought to love him as much as you can: so far at least as to prefer him before all things else that you can think of or desire: then, and not till then, you may be truly said to love him.

But could we once do that, what an excellent people should we then be? how soberly, how righteously, how godly should we then live? The commandments of God would not then seem grievous but pleasant to us; because they are his whom our souls love. If this sacred fire was once kindled in our breasts, it would soon inflame our hearts with such zeal for God, that we should be never easy in our own minds, but whilst we are labouring to promote his glory. We should then account it our only wisdom to know him, our only pleasure to please him, and the only honour we can ever have to honour and glorify him in the world. We should then despise this world, and live above it. Nothing here below could molest or trouble us. For our love being placed upon God above all things else, all things else would seem as nothing to us. But whatsoever happens, our thoughts would still be running after him, and our spirits rejoicing in him, and pleased with every thing that he doth.

And how happy should we then be! As happy as

God himself can make us. For he loves them who love him, and makes all things else to do so, or at least to be as good to them as if they did. He gives his angels charge over them, to keep them in all their ways : so that wheresoever they are, they have a guard of the heavenly host about them, and the Lord of hosts himself at the head of it. The holy Spirit of God directs and assists them in what they do, and then blesses and sanctifies it to their good : yea, *all things work together for good to them who love God*, Rom. viii. 28. So that nothing can happen in this world, but they are sure to be some way or other the better for it. And how happy they will be in the next, we are not able as yet to conceive. For, as it is written, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him*, 1 Cor. ii. 9. And therefore I shall say no more of it, but pray to God that we may all be in the number of those who love him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N C X V .

THE GREAT HAPPINESS OF LOVING GOD.

Rom. viii. 28.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

IT is the Wise-man's observation, that *no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them : all things come alike to all ; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked ; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean ; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not : as is the good, so is the sinner, and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath*, Eccles. ix. 1, 2. The same is confirmed by the common experience of all mankind : go where ye will, ye may with him also see under the sun, that *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ; neither bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill : but time and chance happeneth to them all*, ver. 11. and to all alike. Almighty God seemeth to scatter, as it were, the things of this world among the good and bad promiscuously, without any regard to virtue or vice ; but that some of both sorts may get more, some less, some little or nothing, according as it happens. Be sure there is no judging of what a man is, by what he hath : you can never know a wise man from a fool, a Christian from an

infidel, a saint from a sinner, by his living in a palace or in a cottage, by his being clothed with robes or with rags, by his being rich or poor, healthful or sickly, in honour or disgrace, or by any outward circumstance whatsoever. If there be any difference, the advantage seems mostly to lie on the side of vice and folly ; the worst men having usually the most, and the best men the fewest of the good things, as they are called, here below ; as we read in the Gospel, the wicked rich man *was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day* ; while honest poor Lazarus *was laid at his gate full of sores, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table*, Luke xvi. 19, 20. So it is at this day ; a Jew, a Turk, or, if there be such a monster in nature, an atheist, or, which is much the same, a deist, may thrive, and prosper, and flourish in the world, living in great ease, and plenty, and reputation among his neighbours, while such as live in the true faith and fear of God, are destitute, afflicted, tormented, despised by all that are about them ; or, at least, are in much worse condition as to outward appearance, than the other : I say, as to outward appearance ; for if ye look into the inside of things, you will see it to be quite otherwise ; for after all, though wicked, profane, and irreligious people may abound for a while in the riches, and pleasures, and honours of this world, and therefore may look big, and swagger, and conceit themselves to be happy, and may be esteemed so by others also as wise as themselves, yet all this while their condition is as bad as bad can be, on this side hell ; for living in sin, they are under the displeasure and curse of Almighty God ; so that all the fine things they so much boast of, are accursed to them, and serve only to enhance their reckoning, and increase their torment another day. Their table is only a snare to them, and their wealth an occasion of stumbling : their ease makes them secure, their honours proud, their strength presumptuous, and their plenty in this world

puts all thoughts of the next out of their minds ; so that they sail on, as they think, with a prosperous gale, till on a sudden they are ingulphed, and swallowed up in the abyss of eternal misery, which they never thought of before. Thus all their seeming blessings are so many real curses to them, and contribute sometimes to their fears, and cares, and troubles in this life, and always to their greater misery and torment in that which is to come.

Neither do only the things which they themselves enjoy, but all things else conspire their ruin : for he who made and governs all things, being incensed against them, nothing be sure can do them good, but every thing acting and moving only under him, must needs run cross to them, and some way or other concur to execute his wrath and displeasure upon them. So that howsoever they may flatter themselves with what they seem to have at present, as it is impossible for them to receive any real happiness and satisfaction from it here, so it is impossible for them to escape everlasting destruction *from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power*, except they repent, and turn to him while they are in the body

But if they do that, if they turn to God, so as to love and honour him, the case will be altered with them, so as to become just contrary to what it was before : before, all things wrought together for evil, but now all things shall work together for good to them. This we may be confident of, for so the apostle himself was, when inspired by the infallible Spirit of God, saying, not only, we think, or suppose, or hope, but *we know*, we are sure, *that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose* ; who therefore are not only much happier than the other are, howsoever they may appear to the world, but they are the only happy people that are in it.

But this being a matter wherein we are all so nearly

concerned, it behoves us to look a little more narrowly into it, that we may get as clear a notion of it as we can : for which purpose, it will be necessary to consider,

I. Who they are who are here said *to love God*, and to be *called according to his purpose* : that we may know whether we be in the number of them, and strive all we can to be so.

II. What kind of *good* that is, for which all things are here said *to work, to them who so love God*.

III. How all things work together for their good.

IV. What ground we have to believe they do so.

First therefore, by those who are here said *to love God*, and to be *called according to his purpose*, we are to understand, such as being regenerate of God's holy Spirit, and so made his children by adoption and grace, have their minds wholly bent and inclined toward him, so as really to love and prefer him that made all things before all things that he hath made ; and so *are called out of darkness into his marvellous light*, and that too, *according to his purpose*, or, as it is in the original, κατὰ πρόθεσιν, *according to purpose*, effectually, or, as we say, *to purpose*, so as to come in upon their being called, and to answer the end of it, by *cleaving unto the Lord with purpose of heart*, Acts xi. 23. and making it their constant business to keep his commandments, to serve and glorify him, and to finish the work which he hath given them to do. *He that hath my commandments*, saith he, *and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me*, John xiv. 21. Whatsoever people may pretend, he doth not look upon them as having any real love for him, unless they know his will and do it : but as many as do that, he reckons them in the number of his friends, his servants, his children, his elect, his saints, his peculiar people : and accordingly he takes particular care of them, and manifesteth his special love and favour to them, by ordering all things so as may tend most to their benefit and advantage ; so that *all things*, as the apostle here saith, *work together for good to them*.

For good : not for this or that particular *good*, but for *good* in general ; nor for that which may only seem good in their own, or other people's eyes, but that which is good for them in the judgment of God himself, and by consequence for their real, spiritual, and eternal good : for whatsoever can any way conduce to their being and doing good while they are upon earth, to the making of them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, and so to the bringing of them at last to the actual possession of it. That this is properly the good for which all things work together to them who are so called, appears from the reason which the apostle gives of it in the words following my text, saying, *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called ; and whom he called, them he also justified ; and whom he justified, them he also glorified*, Rom. viii. 29, 30. This is the end, the top of this golden chain of all secondary causes working together for good to them who love God, that they may be glorified with him for ever ; which is the greatest, or rather the only good they can ever have, and all they are capable of. For this good therefore it is, that all things work together for them while they are in this world, even that when they go out of it, they may be eternally happy in the enjoyment of the chiefest good. Whatsoever doth not conduce to this end, can do them no good at all ; they had as good, if not much better, be without it than have it : but whatsoever can any way contribute towards their obtaining of this good, is really good for them ; and therefore all things concur, or work together to bring it about. If riches will thus do them good, all things shall concur to make them rich : if poverty, all things shall concur to keep them poor : if it be good for them to be healthful and strong, all things shall concur to prevent sickness : if it be better to be sick or weak, all things shall concur to

impair their health ; and so in every thing else that can be named. So that every thing that happens, happens well for them, the best that can be ; in that it helps either to the subduing of some vice in them, or to the regulating of some passion, or to the breaking an ill custom, or to the preventing some occasion of falling into sin or mischief, or to the diverting some temptation, or to the arming them against it ; or to the making them more watchful over themselves ; or to the exercising some virtue in them ; or to the putting them in mind of their duty, or to the keeping them close to it ; or to the giving them an opportunity of doing some good, which otherwise they could not do ; or else to their growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and so to the fitting them better to serve God here, and to live with him hereafter. Whatsoever conduceth to these and such like ends, is truly good for them ; and therefore all things concur to effect it. They may be sure of it, for they have the word of God himself for it, assuring them here by his apostle, *that all things work together for their good.*

How all things thus work together for it, is the next question to be considered ; not that we can dive into the secrets of Providence, and see the wonderful series and concatenation of second causes, the dependence and influence of one upon another, and how every one contributes its share to the producing of such an effect : for these things are hid from us, or rather, they are beyond the reach of our understandings ; and therefore it would be presumption in us to offer at the explication of them. It is sufficient for us to observe, that it is not any one thing by itself that doth it, not only some, or many, but all things work together to effect it : as in a physical confection or composition, made up of many ingredients of several qualities, some hot and some cold, some dry and some moist, some lenitive and some astringent, and the like, all mixed together ; although

no one of these ingredients could do any good, but some perhaps, without the other, might do hurt, yet being all mixed together by a skilful hand, they may effect the cure for which they were designed: so here, it is not any one or more particular providences that produce so much good to those who love God, but all together, correcting, influencing, and assisting one another, until they have produced it. So that although no one thing can do it, yet if any thing was wanting, it would not be done, every thing conducing in its kind some way or other towards it: and so all things work together among themselves, and all with God, or rather under him, as the first cause and mover of them, who manageth and orders them, so as to make them *work together for good to them that love him.*

What ground we have to believe they do so, is the last and chief question to be resolved; but they who believe the Scripture to be given by inspiration of God, can make no question of it, it being so expressly affirmed in my text, as a thing most certain and notorious. *We know*, saith the apostle, by divine inspiration, *that all things work together for good to them that love God.* The same necessarily follows also from many other places of holy Scripture; as where it is said, that *no evil shall befall such*, Psal xci. 10. for if no evil can befall them, whatsoever befalls them must be for their good; and where it is said, that *they who seek the Lord shall not want any good thing*, Psal. xxxiv. 10. for if all these things did not work together for their good, there might be some good thing which they might want; but that it seems by God's own word they cannot do: they cannot want any good thing; for indeed all things which are good are theirs, as appears also from the apostle, who, writing to those who were called at Corinth, saith, *All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours*, 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22. For if all things be theirs, all things must

work together for their good, otherwise they could have no use or benefit of them, which, be sure, they always have: for, as the same apostle saith, they are *as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*, 2 Cor. vi. 10. Though they have no civil right to any thing, they have a divine right to, and an interest in, all things that are, so as to possess and enjoy the benefit of them, by having them all working together for their good.

What is thus positively asserted in God's holy word, hath been confirmed also, and found true by the experience of his holy people in all ages. What more unlikely to do them good, than their suffering evil? Yet David could say upon his own experience, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes*, Psal. cxix. 71. And St. Paul, *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. iv. 17. What could be worse than for a man to be sold by his own brethren, carried a slave into a foreign country, and there put into a prison, as Joseph was? yet all these things wrought together, to make him the second man in the kingdom of Egypt. Who could have imagined, that *Saul's going to look for his father's asses*, should be the way to be *anointed king*, 1 Sam. x. 1. that *Goliath's defying the armies of Israel*, should contribute to David's being advanced to the throne, chap. xvii. 10. that Job's losing all he had, should be the means of his getting as much more? Job i. 3. and xlii. 12. There are many such instances, both in sacred and profane history, which shew how wonderfully all things, even the most improbable, and such also as seem to look just contrary, yet turn about at last, and work together to produce some good effect; as none of us but may see also in ourselves, if we do but take notice of it. Nothing ever happened to any of us, but what was designed for our good; and to those who truly love and trust in God, all things that happen, produce the good they were designed for; insomuch that if

any one thing had ever happened otherwise than it did, it would have been worse for them, if not their ruin. This every one may observe in many instances, if he doth but look back, and reflect upon what hath befallen him through the whole course of his past-by life. And though we cannot as yet perceive in all, while we see only as through *a glass darkly*, yet when we come to heaven, and there have the light of God's countenance shining continually upon us, by it we shall discover his goodness to us in every thing that fell out from our first coming into the world, to our going out again, and see how they all wrought together to bring us to that blessed place, that we may praise him for it, and enjoy the benefit of it for evermore.

But that we may be able also to give a reason of this hope that is in us, even that *all things work together for good to them that love God*, we must farther observe, that as this hope is grounded upon the infallible word of God, and strengthened by the constant experience of his people in all ages, so our very reason also may convince us of it, by demonstrating both that, and why it is so : or, to speak more plainly, both that *all things do work together*, and how it comes to pass, that they so *work together for good to those that love God, and are called according to his purpose*.

That they do so, may be sufficiently proved from this one argument : as there is no sort of people or nation, we know in the world, but have, at least, some general notions of another life after this, so they all agree, that they who are good and virtuous in this life, shall be happy in the other. This seems to be one of those common principles that are planted in our very nature, so that none that have the use of their reason can deny it, without offering violence to themselves ; much less can any who profess themselves to be Christians doubt of it, it being so plainly revealed, and promised by Almighty God in the holy Scripture, given by his inspiration. But if all things did not work together for good to such persons in this world, so as to bring them at

last to a state of happiness in the next, this could not be, or at least we could never be certain of it: for some things might so fall out, as to impede and hinder their attainment of happiness, notwithstanding all their goodness and virtue. We often see how a little accident overthrows a great design. And if it was in the power of any one thing to prejudice those who love God, so as to prevent their salvation, they might never be saved. And so the word and promise of God (which is impossible) would fail. And so it might too, if all things did not work together for their good, or in order to their salvation. For no one thing, except God, can do any thing of itself: but all secondary causes concur to the producing of every effect; much more, so great an effect, as the sanctification and salvation of mankind. So that if all things did not work together for it, it could never be effected. But we are sure that it is effected for all those who truly love God; and therefore conclude, that it is impossible but that all things should work together for their good.

Neither is it difficult to shew how they come to do so. For it is certain, that all who love God, are beloved of him; his love to them being the cause of theirs to him. *We love him because he first loved us*, 1 John iv. 19. Indeed there is nothing more plainly revealed, or more frequently asserted in God's holy word, than that he hath a special love and kindness for them, who truly love and honour him. *He that hath my commandments, saith our Lord, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him*, John i. 21. *For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and believed that I came out from God*, chap. xvi. 27. There are many expressions all over the Bible to the same purpose; but I have instanced more particularly in these, because they shew, that God, as he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, hath a particular love for those who love him, and are effectually called by him. From whence it necessarily follows, that all

things must work together for their good, and that they do so by reason of God's love and favour to them. For he being the first cause, the supreme director and governor of all things that are, so that they all act and move only under him, and according to his will and pleasure; therefore all things work together for good to those who love him, because he loves them, and it is his good will and pleasure they should do so: for nothing can resist his will; but all things work and move just as he would have them, and therefore must needs work together for good to them whom he loves, for that reason, because it is his will they should; or, which is in effect the same, because he hath a good will or love for them, and therefore orders and determines the influences and operations of all things under him, so as to make them concur and co-operate for their good and benefit: as we see also in the troubles and afflictions which befall such persons: for it is expressly said, *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*, Heb. xii. 6. And, *as many as I love*, saith he, *I rebuke and chasten*, Rev. iii. 19. Which shews, that it is from his love to them, that any trouble or chastisement falls upon them. But that also is for their good, the greatest good they are capable of, even that *they may be partakers of his holiness*, Heb. xii. 10. that they may be sanctified or made holy, *as he who hath called them is holy*; and so be meet to live with him in the other world. And what greater good can they ever desire? Yet this is the happy effect of the very chastisements which God is pleased to lay upon those who love him, and which he is therefore pleased to lay upon them, because he loves them. So it is in all things else: *all things work together for good to those who love God*, because he loves them, and therefore disposeth of all things so as to make them do it.

But how can this be? Although there be many doubtless upon earth that truly love God, and are accordingly

loved by him ; yet their love to him is far short of what he deserves from them ; it is expressed but very imperfectly, and there is not the best of them but do many things offensive to his divine goodness, and provoking to the eyes of his glory. How comes it then to pass, that notwithstanding all their imperfections and provocations, he still continues to love them, and to love them so, as to make all things serve them, and work together for their good ? This is a great mystery, but it will be soon unfolded, if we do but consider, that all who truly love God, believe also in our Lord Jesus Christ. For it is *faith that works by love*. So that no man can have any true love for God without true faith in Christ ; such a faith, whereby he is united to him, made a member of his body, and so partakes of his holy Spirit. But for all who are thus nearly related to him upon earth, Christ is always interceding in heaven : *he appears there in the presence of God for them*, Heb. ix. 24. *as the Mediator between him and them*, 1 Tim. ii. 5. making up all differences that may happen : he is their Advocate with the Father, to plead their cause, and bring them off upon all occasions ; as he may well do, *seeing he is a propitiation for their sins, and for the sins of the whole world*, 1 John ii. 1, 2. and is therefore *able to save to the utmost those who come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*, Heb. vii. 25.

And hence it is, that they who love God, notwithstanding all their failures and imperfections, still continue in his love and favour, so as to have all things work together for their good, even because his Son, their Saviour Christ, is continually interceding with him for them : who himself also having *all things put under his feet, and being made the head over all things for his church, which is his body*, Ephes. i. 22, 23. he takes particular care, that *all things should work together for good to them who love God* ; they being all real members of his said body. This is the great work that he is

continually doing in heaven. *My Father*, saith he, *worketh hitherto, and I work*, John v. 17. As God the Father is continually ordering all things, so as to make them work together for the good of the whole creation ; so God the Son is continually ordering all things, so as to make them work together for the good of his church, and all the sound members of it ; that they may not fail of that inheritance which he hath purchased for them with his own blood, and so it may not be spilt in vain : which therefore is another great reason, why all things conspire in so wonderful a manner to do them good.

To which we may add, that as God the Father, and God the Son, so likewise God the Holy Ghost that proceeds from both, co-operates with them in all things to bring about and accomplish the same most gracious design ; not only by moving upon all things, as he did at first upon the waters, to bring them into such an order of working together, as may tend most to that end ; but also by moving upon those that love God, so as to enable them to get some good or other by all things that happen : so that howsoever things work together, they by his assistance are the better for it. We have a famous instance of this in St. Paul, *I have learned*, saith he, *in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*, Phil. iv. 11, 12, 13. For here we see, that he being strengthened and assisted by the Spirit of Christ, nothing could come amiss to him. He was ready for all occurrences alike ; wealth and poverty, honour and disgrace, fulness and want, was the same thing to him. He was in all things instructed, having learned to use and improve every condition, so as to be the better for it, and therefore contented with it, and satisfied, that it was the best he could

be, in at that time : insomuch that he could say upon his own experience, that the very afflictions he met with, *wrought out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. iv. 18. And in my text, that *all things work together for good to them who love God*, as he did : such a mighty force had the Spirit of Christ upon him.

And so it hath upon all that love God, as well as upon him. For being all acted and governed by the same holy Spirit, by him they are taught, directed, and enabled to pick some good or other out of every dispensation of divine Providence, and turn it to their own advantage, for which it was designed. They by his divine power can extract good out of evil, and work their own salvation out of the same things which other people abuse to their eternal ruin and destruction. So that as all things else work together for their good, so they themselves also work together with all things else, to make them attain their end, in being really good for them.

If they be rich and great in the world, they lay hold of the opportunities which God hath put into their hands, *to do good in the world, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, and so to lay up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may attain eternal life*, 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19. If they be poor, and all things concur to make them so, it is to preserve them from the snares and temptations of the world, to keep them meek, and humble, and poor in spirit ; to make them rich in faith, and hope, and trust on God ; to put them out of love with this world, and to make them long for the other, where they shall have as much as the best of them, and infinitely more than any can have in this. And they accordingly make use of their low condition, and improve it to such good ends and purposes.

If they enjoy health and strength of mind and body, they employ it wholly in his service who gives it to them.

If they are sick and weak, the sense of their weakness adds strength to their faith, and seriousness to their repentance, and puts them upon daily expectation of, and preparation for, their great change.

If they marry, and have a meet help, a suitable companion, their hearts are lifted up with thankfulness to God for it, and they strive all they can to help one another forward in the way to heaven, that they may live together there as well as here. If it be otherwise, they are patient and submissive ; they learn to live above this vain and wicked world, and seek for comfort in heaven, seeing they can find none upon earth.

If they have children, they do all they can to answer God's end in giving them, by bringing them up in his nurture and admonition, that they may serve and glorify him in the world. If they have none, they have less care upon them for the things of this life, and therefore take more care of that which is to come.

If their children are good and dutiful, they live with a constant sense of God's special favour to them. If after all they prove wicked and undutiful, it puts them in mind how undutiful they themselves have been to their heavenly Father, and so keeps them humble and penitent for their former sins, and more careful to perform their duty to him, as they desire their children should perform theirs to them.

If they have any true friends, they thank God for them, and make use of their friendship, as a means whereby to do good to them, as well as to receive any kindness from them. If they have enemies, they take that occasion to shew their love to Christ, by loving them in obedience to his command.

If they live in the midst of wars and tumults, they always stand upon their watch, that they may not be surprised with sudden death, but ready for it whensoever it shall come. If all things are quiet about them, they can more freely serve God, and do good in the world ; and accordingly make it their business to do so.

If they are advanced to honour in this world, they find by experience the vanity of that, and therefore seek more diligently for the honour that cometh from God only. If they live in disgrace and contempt among their neighbours, it makes them more sensible of their own vileness, and teacheth them to have their conversation more in heaven, where only true honour is to be had.

If they thrive and gain much in the world by their calling, or friends, or any other lawful way, they look upon it as coming from God, and put into their hands for his use and service, and therefore employ it accordingly. If they meet with losses and disappointments, they look upon them also as sent from God, and designed for their good; and therefore contrive all ways whereby to get good, and grow better by them: so that in both respects they can truly say with Job, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*, Job i. 21.

Thus we might run through all conditions of life, and all occurrences that can ever happen to any man upon earth, and shew how they who love God, by the assistance of his Holy Spirit, use and improve them, so as to receive great benefit and advantage from all and every one of them. And then it is no wonder that *all things work together for good to those who love God, and are called according to his purpose*; seeing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and likewise the communion or fellowship of the Holy Ghost, is always with them.

If people would seriously reflect upon these things, and keep them always fresh in their minds, they would need no other argument to persuade them to call in for their affections from all things else, and fix them wholly upon God, so as to devote themselves to his service, and make it their constant care and study to please, honour, and obey him. For what course can ye ever take, whereby to get so much as ye may by this means? By your moiling and toiling in the world, ye may perhaps,

and but perhaps, get something that looks like wealth and honour in the eyes of deluded mortals : but besides that, there is nothing at the bottom of it but vanity and vexation of spirit ; so that you will not be one jot the wiser or better for it when you have it, if not much worse. Besides that, I say, you can never expect to get all things, but only something, and some of the things only which are upon earth, which altogether bear no proportion to all that is in the world : whereas, by exercising yourselves continually in the service of God, by fasting and praying, and hearing God's holy word, and partaking of his body and blood, you may have *the thoughts of your hearts cleansed by the inspiration of his holy Spirit, so as perfectly to love him, and worthily magnify his holy name.* And then all things in the world will be yours, and work together, as ye have now heard, for your good. Then you will be rich indeed, as rich as all the world, and he that made it too, can make you. And yet there is never a one here present but may become thus rich, so as to have all things at his service, if he will but set himself in good earnest upon looking after it. Which therefore I heartily wish you would all do, as you tender your own good and welfare. And if any have done it already, as I hope some have, I as heartily wish them joy of that prodigious estate they are now possessed of. Whatsoever you have or have not upon earth, it is all one : for all things are yours ; what ye have not, as well as what ye have, always working together for your good. Ye cannot doubt of it : for he that made and disposeth of all things in the world, hath here assured you of it. He hath already settled them all upon you, that they may do you all the good ye are capable of in this world : and in the next you will *inherit all things*, Rev. xxi. 7. and so be as happy as it is possible for you to be, through Christ our Lord;

S E R M O N C X V I .

THE EASINESS OF CHRIST'S YOKE.

MATT. xi. 28.

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.*

MAN being at first designed for the constant service and immediate worship of Almighty God, he was therefore so composed, and made of such a temper and constitution, that he can be no way happy, but only by doing the work he was made for : being so exactly fitted for it, that he is always out of tune, restless and unquiet, but whilst he is wholly employed about it. Hence all men being naturally desirous of happiness, they cannot but offer at something like to religion, or the worshipping of God : and howsoever they perform it, they still find something of rest and satisfaction within themselves, arising from the apprehensions that they have done their duty, and paid their homage to him that made them. So that it seems to be agreed upon on all hands, that it is our interest to be religious. The great question is, what it is to be so ? A question which mankind could never yet agree in : as appears from the many and diverse religions that always have been and still are professed in the world. And whatsoever religion it is that any man professeth, be sure he thinks

that to be the right, and therefore expects happiness and comfort from it, otherwise he would not profess it.

Hence, therefore, although there be many things which highly commend the Christian before all other religions to us, as the purity of its precepts, the excellency of its doctrine, the strictness of its discipline, and the testimony which God himself hath given to it, by many and real miracles, wherein it far exceeds all others; yet that which should principally draw us to it, and confirm us in it, is the certainty of those principles which it doth propound, whereupon to trust for happiness and salvation; for hereby it gives that rest and quiet to the soul, which religion in general aims at, and none but itself can assure us of, or bring us to. And therefore it is that our blessed Saviour makes use of this as the principal reason, wherefore we should embrace that religion which he hath established in the world, because in it we may find rest to our souls; *Come to me*, saith he, *all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest to your souls.*

Where we may observe, by the way, how far our blessed Saviour exceeds not only the heathen idols, together with Mahomet and his pretended angel, but even Moses and the prophets too, in that he doth not call upon us, as they do, to turn unto the Lord, but to come to him. And as he never ushers in his words as the prophets do, by saying, *Thus saith the Lord*, but, *Thus say I, Verily, verily, I say unto you*; so neither doth he promise, as they do, that if we hearken to him, *the Lord will give us rest*, but that he himself will do it, *and I will give you rest.* The reason of all which is clear, even because he that spake these words was himself that Lord of hosts, to whom we ought to come, as to the only centre wherein our souls can rest, *God blessed for evermore.*

Which I therefore observe, because it should make us the more inquisitive into the true sense and purport

of these words ; for seeing they are not the words of our fellow-creature, but of our great Creator, the supreme Being and Governor of the world ; we that were made by him and depend continually upon him, cannot surely but be very desirous to know his divine will and pleasure in them ; especially considering that these words contain the sum and substance of the whole Gospel, even whatsoever is either required of us, or promised to us by him, who came from heaven to earth, on purpose to make way for us to go from earth to heaven.

Wherefore, that we may understand our Lord's meaning aright, we shall consider,

I. Who they are whom he here calls by the name of those *that labour and are heavy laden*.

II. What he would have them do, saying, *Come to me*.

III. What he here promiseth to them that do so, in these words, *and I will give you rest*.

I. He calls all such, and only such, as are *κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι*, that so labour as to be weary of the work, and heavy laden with the burden of their sins. He calls only such, because he knows none else will come unto him : for they who are so wedded to their lusts, that they are loth to be divorced from them, and therefore labour, not to subdue, but to cherish them ; they that think not their sins to be a burden, but a pleasure, and therefore care not to be eased of them ; yea, and all they too that fancy not their crimes to be so great, but that God will pardon them without a Saviour, or at least hope the good works they sometimes seem to do, will make him amends for all the bad ones they ever did : all such think they have no need of Christ, and therefore they will never come unto him. But Christ, be sure, hath less need of them, and therefore he doth not so much as call them.

But as for others, whether they be high or low, bond or free, Jew or Gentile, he invites them all that *labour*

and are heavy laden. Where, by labouring we are to understand, as the Greek word imports, such as so labour as to be weary of working: weary, not in a carnal, but in a spiritual sense; not in body, but in mind; that are weary of their sins, and heartily desirous to be freed from them: that labour so much under the sense of their natural averseness to God and goodness, and their impetuous inclinations to sin and vanity, that they know not what to do with themselves, but are often forced to cry out in the bitterness of their souls, as St. Paul did, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death that is with me!* Rom. vii. 24.

And they who are thus *weary* of their present lusts, cannot but be *heavy laden* too with the pressure of their former impieties, the remembrance thereof being so grievous to them, the burden so intolerable, that they are scarce able to bear it any longer, but are ready, each moment, to sink under it, and to fall down into horror and despair. Thus it was with David, when he cried out, *Mine iniquities are gone over my head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me,* Psal. xxxviii. 4. Thus it must be with those whom Christ here calls unto him, and thus it must be with us, if ever we desire to receive any benefit or advantage from him.

And, verily, I hope we all here present are, I am certain we have all but too much cause to be, thus qualified for our coming unto Christ. But that we may be sure to be so for the future, let us recollect ourselves a little, and consider, how many and great our sins have been; and what we have deserved by them; but alas! who is able to do that? who can understand his errors? or tell, how oft he hath offended? We may as well undertake to count the stars of heaven, or number the sands upon the sea-shore, to fathom the depth of the sea, or reckon up the hairs of our head, as ever compute the many sins and failings we have been guilty of. And

this might justly make our hearts even fail within us, as it did David's, that our sins have been so many, our transgressions innumerable.

Especially if we consider the greatness as well as the multitude of our sins, that they are not only so many that they cannot be numbered, but so great too that they can never be weighed by us, being all committed against the clearest light, the greatest love, and strictest vows, and the highest obligations to the contrary, that ever the sins of mortals were.

And if to all this we consider the just desert of every sin, we cannot surely but labour very much under the heavy load of those many and great ones that lie upon us. For what have our sins deserved? or rather, what have they not deserved? seeing death itself is the wages thereof, which from the beginning was entailed upon sin, as sin, and by consequence upon all sin, one as well as another; death temporal, death spiritual, and death eternal: under which are comprehended all the miseries which our natures are capable of, or our persons can ever be obnoxious to. Even in this life our sins deprive us of many and great blessings, which otherwise we should enjoy; and bring upon us as many and great troubles, which otherwise we should be free from. Whatsoever pains or aches in our bodies, whatsoever cares or perplexities in our minds, whatsoever griefs or sorrows in our hearts, whatsoever losses or crosses in our estates, relations, or designs, we ever either felt or fear, we must impute them all to those sins, which we, ungrateful creatures, have committed against him that made and governs the world.

Yet these temporal are nothing in comparison of those spiritual and eternal miseries which our sins have made us subject to; for by reason of them the Lord of hosts himself is angry with us; he that made us is incensed against us, and become our enemy. And what shall we do, when he shall rise up to take vengeance of us, for affronting his Majesty, despising his threats,

abusing his mercies, and transgressing his righteous and just commands, as we have done? Can we resist his power, or avoid the strokes of his provoked justice? Shall we be able to *dwell with everlasting burnings*, or endure the flames of a consuming fire? Yes, this is the sad condition our sins have brought us all into. We all, at this moment, stand upon the brink of the bottomless pit, and know not but the next step we take may be into it. And if God should, as he justly may, cause us all to drop from the place where we sit or stand, down into the abyss of misery, how strangely should we be surprised to find ourselves surrounded, on a sudden, with those infernal flames? What horror and confusion, what astonishment and consternation should we soon be in, to see ourselves amongst the fiends of hell, and to feel the torments of that damned crew? to behold omnipotence, glory, majesty, justice, yea, and mercy too, setting itself against us, while we lie scorching in the fiery furnace of incensed wrath and indignation.

But this is too sad and doleful a subject to insist on long; neither should I have mentioned it at all, but only to prepare you the better to accept the motion which your Saviour himself here makes unto you, of coming unto him. For the premises being duly weighed, you cannot but look upon your condition as desperate, your misery as unavoidable, unless there be some way or other found out whereby to have your sins pardoned, and your hearts for the future eased of them. But give me leave to tell you in the name of our Lord and Master Christ, that he is ready to do it for you, if you will but come unto him. And that you might not at all doubt of it, he hath given you his own word for it, and hath left it upon record for all generations to read and observe; saying, *Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

But then you will say, what doth he mean by coming to him? Why! for that, lest you should be mistaken

in it, he himself hath elsewhere told you what he means by it, saying, *He that cometh to me shall never hunger, he that believeth in me shall never thirst*, John vi. 35. From whence it is plain, that by coming to him he meaneth neither more nor less than believing in him.


But then the question returns, what is it to believe in Christ? A question, I confess, of very great importance; forasmuch as the whole tenor of the Gospel lays the main stress of our salvation upon our believing aright: and therefore in speaking to it, I shall not discourage your attention with any impertinent distinctions or nice speculations about it; much less shall I trouble you with any new notions or private opinions of it; but shall give you the sense of our church concerning it, which in the Homily of faith, speaking of a quick and lively faith, such as the Gospel requires, saith, *This is not only the common belief of the articles of our faith, but it is also a true trust and confidence of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and a stedfast hope of all good things to be received at God's hand.* And elsewhere it saith, *The right and true Christian faith is not only to believe that the holy Scripture and all the articles of our faith are true; but also to have a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ.* Which definition of our church is not only agreeable to the notion of faith, received by the catholic or universal church in all ages, since the apostles' days; but it is the same in effect with that description which the apostle himself gives of it, saying, *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*, Heb. ii. 1. which words contain not only an encomium, as some have thought, but a plain description of faith, as it respects both the promises made and the truths revealed by the most high God. In the first respect, it is *the substance of things hoped for*; in the other, *the evidence of things not seen*.

For whereas there be some things recorded as done

heretofore, other things foretold to come to pass hereafter, and many great mysteries revealed and attested by God in the holy Scriptures ; such things as these are, although they appear neither to our sense nor our understanding ; yet having the testimony of God, the supreme truth himself, for them, faith is a clear evidence and demonstration of them : that is, by faith we are as fully persuaded of the truth and certainty of them, as if our eye saw, or our reason could comprehend them ; yea, and much more too ; for our senses may deceive us, and so may our reason also ; but the eternal God is of that infinite wisdom, that he cannot be deceived himself, and of that infinite goodness, that it is as impossible for him to deceive us. So that there is nothing in the world that we can have so much reason to believe, as we have to believe whatsoever he saith.

Wherefore faith being grounded upon the testimony of God, therefore only believing what he saith, because he saith it, it cannot but possess the soul with a clearer sight, a fuller evidence, and a greater certainty of the truths which it believes, than all the arguments and demonstrations in the world can do : it matters not the distance of time or place, nor the seeming impossibility of the thing propounded ; it is sufficient that he who cannot lie hath said it, and therefore it cannot but believe it. By this faith it was, that Abraham saw Christ's day above two thousand years before it came, John viii. 56. By this we may now see Christ in heaven, with all his glorious saints, martyrs, and confessors about him, as plainly as if ourselves were there among them. By this I am as certain we shall all one day stand before Christ's tribunal, as I am that we are now in this place. And by this it is that we are fully persuaded of the truth and certainty of all the articles of our Christian religion ; because attested by Christ, by God himself ; yet this is not all that is required to the making up of a true and lively faith. For that, as

our church observes, consists not only in the believing all the articles of our Christian faith ; *but likewise in a sure trust and confidence on the merciful promises of God in Jesus Christ our Lord* : that is, in the apostle's words, *it is not only the evidence of things not seen, but likewise the substance of things hoped for* ; which is therefore placed first, because principally to be considered.

For the understanding whereof, we must consider how that man having, by his fall from the chiefest good, forfeited his right and title to all things that are good for him ; the eternal Son of God was pleased, with no less a price than his own blood, to redeem it for us again, so as to put us into a capacity of being actually restored to it. For upon the account of what he hath done and suffered for us, God himself hath again promised all good things to us, which as they are good, they cannot but be the object of our hope ; and as they are promised by God, must needs be the object of our faith too ; of that faith, which the apostle here says *is the substance of things hoped for* ; that is, as the Syriac translation renders it, it is  a full persuasion of things which are in hope, as if they were in act. For faith *περὶ ὁγχαφεῖ*, as Theodoret words it ; *representat*, as St. Ambrose ; it *foreshews*, it paints to the life, and represents them all to us, as fully and clearly as if we had them before our eyes. Yea, by faith, as St. Hierom saith, we do already possess them. St. Chrysostom goes further, saying, *that faith doth not only cause the things we hope for to subsist in our hearts*, ἀλλ' αὐτὴ ἐστὶν οὐσία αὐτῶν, *but itself is the very essence or substance of them*, realizing them as much unto us, as if we were already in the actual possession of them.

And verily it can do no less : for if he be but an honest man that hath promised a kindness to us, we reckon ourselves as certain of it, as if we already had it. How much more when God himself hath passed his

word and made a promise to us ? Certainly, in such a case, our faith should bear some proportion to the firmness and infallibility of the ground on which it is placed, so as to carry us above all doubts and diffidence whatsoever ; as it did the father of the faithful, *who staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory unto God, and being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform*, Rom. iv. 20, 21. Such a faith had David, as we may observe all along in the Psalms ; where it is called, as it usually is in the Old Testament, *trusting or confiding in the Lord*. Such a faith should we have in all the promises of God : and that, notwithstanding they are made only to mankind in general ; for so are all the commands too ; yet every one is bound to obey them. So here, though the promises of God be propounded only in general terms to mankind, and not to any particular person ; yet every particular person is bound to believe and trust on them.

But here it is necessary to observe, that as our obedience should be of the same extent and latitude with God's commands ; so should our faith be with his promises. We must not pick and choose, take one and leave another. He that doth not believe all, believes none : for he hath the same ground to believe every one, as he hath to believe any of them. Only we must carefully distinguish betwixt the promises which are made *of* godliness, and those which are made *unto* it ; which, as the apostle saith, *hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*, 1 Tim. iv. 8. The promises which are made of godliness are absolute, the rest are all conditional. Of the first sort are these exceeding great and precious promises, which St. Peter speaks of, and saith, *that by them we are partakers of the divine nature*, 2 Pet. i. 4. Such are the promises of the new covenant ; as, that he will put his law in our hearts, and write it in our inward parts : that he will give us a new heart, and put a new

spirit within us : that he will pour out his own Spirit upon us, and cause us to walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments : in short, that he will give us grace to repent and turn to him. These promises are made absolutely by God, and therefore should be as absolutely believed by us.

But as for the promises of pardon and salvation, they are all made with this proviso or condition, that the former promises be first believed, and so made good to us ; that we first repent, and then we shall be pardoned ; first be holy, and then we shall be happy. And therefore no man can believe that God will pardon his sins, unless he repent, for he hath no such promise ; God hath never said he would. But rather, on the contrary, we are bound to believe that God will not pardon our sins, except we repent ; because God hath said he will not. *Except ye repent*, saith he, *ye shall all likewise perish*, Luke xiii. 3. So that I have the same reason to believe that God will not pardon my sins except I do repent, as I have to believe he will pardon them if I do repent. Yea, and I have the same reason too to believe that God will give me repentance, that so my sins may be pardoned, as I have to believe that my sins shall be pardoned when I have repented : for I have his promise of both.

Having therefore so many and great promises made to us by him, who is so infinitely just and faithful to his word, that he cannot falsify it, it cannot but be our duty to believe and trust in them, in the highest manner that possibly we can. And unless we do so, we can never expect they should be performed to us. For this is absolutely required in order to the performance of all God's promises, that we stedfastly believe he will perform them. A remarkable instance whereof our blessed Lord himself hath given us. For having said, *Ask, and it shall be given you*, Matt. vii. 7 and so passed his word, that whatsoever we pray for, we shall receive ; he elsewhere explains himself, saying, *Whatsoever things ye*

desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them, Mark xi. 24. So that if we do believe that God, according to his word, will give us the good things we pray for, then he will do it, otherwise not. The same may be said of all other promises whatsoever. If we will not trust God, nor take his word for what he hath said, we exclude ourselves from the benefit of his promises. But if we certainly believe that he will perform them, he will most certainly perform them to us.

Hence therefore faith may in this sense also be justly termed the substance of things hoped for; not only as the word *ὑπόστασις* sometimes signifies confidence and full persuasion; but likewise in that faith puts us into the actual possession, and so gives us the very substance of those good things we hope for at the hands of God, according to the promises he hath made to mankind in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now from the nature of faith in general thus explained, we may easily gather what it is properly to believe in Christ. For seeing he was the first thing that was ever promised to mankind, Gen. iii. and all other promises being virtually, yea, really contained in him; hence to believe in Christ is indeed to believe in all the promises of God, as made and confirmed to us in Christ. For, as the apostle saith, *All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen*, 2 Cor. i. 20. that is, as St. Chrysostom expounds it, *ἐν αὐτῷ γενέσθαι ἔχουσι καὶ πληρωθῆναι*, *in him they have their being and accomplishment*, or confirmation. So that, all things considered, I know not how we can express the right notion of true faith in Christ better, than in the words of our Church before quoted; where she defines it to be a sure trust and confidence on God's merciful promises to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ. For this plainly supposes, that we trust on God's merciful promises to be converted from our sins by Christ, to have our sins pardoned by him, to be sanctified and accepted by him.

For otherwise we cannot possibly be saved from everlasting damnation by him.

When our Saviour therefore bids us come unto him, or believe in him, his will and pleasure in brief is this, that we come off from all vain conceits and expectations from ourselves; from all trusting to our own obedience or good works, and from all dependence upon our own natural powers or acquired parts, and that we put our whole trust and confidence only on him, as in whom all God's promises are made and confirmed to us, for all things necessary to make us holy here, or happy for ever. And if we do this, our blessed Lord here tells us, *he will give us rest*, which is the last thing to be considered in the words.

But for the understanding of this, we must consider what kind of persons they are which our Saviour here calls unto him, *even those that labour, and are heavy laden*; that is, as I have shewn, such as are weary of the tyranny, as well as heavy laden with the burden of their sins, that long to have their lusts subdued, as well as their transgressions pardoned to them, being troubled both with and for their sins. Now from both these troubles Christ here promises to free those that come unto him, and to give them rest, both from the power, and from the guilt of sin that lies so heavy upon them. And verily he is equally qualified for the conferring of both these great blessings upon us; being *made unto us wisdom as well as righteousness, our sanctification as well as redemption*, 1 Cor. i. 30. *And he was exalted to be both a Prince and a Saviour, and so give repentance to Israel, as well as remission of sins*, Acts v. 31. So that he hath not only power to give us pardon, if we do repent; but to give us repentance too, that so we may be pardoned.

First therefore, if we come to Christ, he will free us from the power and tyranny of sin. Sin shall no longer have dominion over us, because then we shall not be under the law, but under his grace. And he will give

us such a repentance, that our hearts shall be wholly turned from sin to God. And that he both can and will do this for us, is plain from the design of his coming into the world. For he was sent on purpose *to destroy the works of the devil*, 1 John iii. 8. *and to bless us, by turning every one of us from his iniquities*, Acts iii. 26. *yea, he therefore gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*, Tit. ii. 14. *and that he might present us to himself holy and without blemish*, Ephes. v. 27. This therefore being one great end both of his assuming of, and suffering in, our human nature, we need not fear but that he both can and will do it for us.

Especially considering, that, for the accomplishment thereof, he by his death hath purchased not only the pardon of our sins, but likewise the right of bestowing the Spirit upon us; and therefore he promises his disciples, that when he was gone he would send the Spirit to them; but tells them withal, *that unless he went, the Spirit could not come*, John xvi. 7. Assuring us thereby, that the coming of the Spirit depended upon his merit and mediation for us in heaven. And verily as it is only by the death of Christ that our sins can be pardoned; so it is only by his Spirit that our lusts can be subdued, and our hearts made holy. For although the human nature in general was sanctified by its being assumed into the divine Person, yet no human person in particular can be sanctified, but by its partaking of the divine nature. Hence they who are sanctified or made holy, are said to be *partakers of the divine nature*, 2 Pet. i. 4. and to partake of God's holiness, which is his nature, Heb. xii. 1. But we can no way partake of the divine nature, but by *the Spirit of God dwelling in us*, as the apostle speaks, Rom. viii. 9.

Neither is there any other way whereby we can possibly have the Spirit of God to dwell within us, but only by our being united to Christ by faith. For the whole

design of the Gospel teacheth us, that Christ, as Θεάνθρωπος and Mediator, is the only head, from whom the Spirit is diffused into all the members of his mystical body the church, that is, the congregation of all faithful people, or such as really and truly believe in him. And therefore such, and only such, as thus believe in Christ, are enabled by his Spirit to do all such good works as God hath prepared for them to walk in. *For who is he, saith the apostle, that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* 1 John v. 5. plainly implying, that no man can mortify his lusts, or overcome the temptations of the world, but only by faith in Christ. *For as the branch, saith Christ himself, cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. But he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit,* John xv. 4, 5. As if he should have said, Such as continue to put their whole trust and confidence in me, such, and only such, I will enable to perform whatsoever is required of them. Which we see exactly fulfilled in St. Paul, saying, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,* Phil. iv. 13.

Hence therefore we may observe, how truly our Church asserts, that good works do necessarily spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit. For seeing Christ doth most certainly communicate all the graces of his Spirit, the only principle of all true piety and goodness, to those who truly believe in him, hence it must needs follow, that though faith and works be distinguished in the notion, they are never separated in the subject; but that whosoever true faith is, it always purifies the heart, sanctifies the whole soul, and so produceth all manner of good works, both of piety towards God, and likewise of justice and charity to our neighbour, as the fathers frequently affirm: and by consequence, that whosoever doth not perform sincere obedience to all the commandments of

God, he may pretend what he pleases, but he doth not truly believe in Christ. For if he did so, Christ would most certainly perform the promise he here makes of freeing him from his sins, by enduing him with the grace of the Holy Spirit, to amend his life according to God's holy word.

This therefore is the first thing our Saviour here promiseth to those that come unto him, and the first thing which we should go unto him for, even our sanctification. For without this, whatsoever else he doth or can do for us, will avail us nothing: no, not though he should carry us into heaven. For heaven itself would be no heaven to us, unless we be first sanctified, and so made capable of enjoying those pure and spiritual delights, which are there provided for us. For suppose any one here present, that is still in his sins, and so averse from God and goodness, should be immediately snatched up and placed among the glorified saints and angels, adoring and praising God in heaven, what happiness could such a one find? what pleasure could he take either in their company or employment? Alas! his sinful soul is altogether averse from such holy persons and actions as those are. Insomuch that heaven itself would seem more like hell than heaven to him. The company would seem irksome, the work tedious, and the very presence of God himself would afford more matter of grief and trouble, than of joy and happiness to him. In short, a blind man may as soon distinguish colours, and a deaf man sounds; yea, a brute beast may as soon surfeit himself upon the pleasures of a mathematical demonstration, as ever a sinful soul be ravished with these celestial joys, which are not only above him, but contrary to his very temper and inclinations. And therefore unless our blessed Saviour incline our hearts to God, and sanctify our natures throughout, we shall not be qualified for heaven, nor for any other blessing whatsoever which he hath procured for us. But, blessed be his name for it, if we do but come unto him, he is

both able and willing to do not only this, but whatsoever else we can desire of him.

For he will not only free us from the strength, but likewise from the guilt of these sins we labour under. He will take care that all our bonds and obligations to punishment be cancelled, and made void by virtue of that infinite satisfaction which he himself hath made to divine justice for them. For he being both God and man in one and the same person, whatsoever he suffered as man, could not but be of infinite value and merit; because, though the nature in which he suffered was but finite, yet the Person which suffered in that nature was infinite. Hence therefore this divine Person suffering in our human nature not only stripes, agonies, reproaches, but even death itself, that death which was due to the whole nature of man, being undergone by it, in the divine Person, was more than if all the human persons in the world had suffered eternal death, and by consequence as much as justice itself could require. And therefore it is said, that he was made *a propitiation for the sins of the whole world*, 1 John ii. 2. that is, in the words of our church, *he by his own oblation of himself once offered, hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient, sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world*, or of all mankind. Insomuch, that if any one man's sins be not pardoned by them, it is not for want of sufficiency in Christ's sufferings, but by reason of his own obstinacy or negligence, in not performing the conditions required for the applying the sufferings of the human nature in Christ unto his own particular Person. For seeing that that death, which was threatened to all mankind in the first Adam, was undergone by the whole nature of man in the second; hence all particular persons, comprehended under that general nature, are capable of receiving the benefit of those sufferings, if they will but apply them rightly to themselves. And all that is required for the application of them, is only to perform the duty enjoined in my text,

even to come to Christ in the sense which I have now explained. For if we do that, Christ himself hath here told us, that he will give us rest.

Having thus explained these words unto you, I might now use some arguments whereby to prevail upon you to go to Christ, that so you may find rest to your souls : but that I hope will be altogether needless and in vain. For needs a shipwrecked seaman be courted to come to shore, or a weary traveller to a place of rest ? Needs a man in want be desired to receive relief, or one in pain to accept of ease ? How then can we, who know how many and great our sins have been, how strong and prevalent our lusts still are, how can we need arguments to persuade us to go to Christ, who alone can save us ? However, I humbly crave leave in his name to speak a few words unto you.

Although you be here at present, the time you know will come, when you will all be in another world ; either in a world of happiness, or else in a world of misery, that is, either in heaven or in hell, there to live for evermore. And, from your presence here at this time, I cannot but conclude that you all desire and hope when you die to go to heaven, the only place of real and eternal happiness. But heaven you know is a place where none but saints can come. And therefore unless you be not such as call themselves saints in our days, but really and truly so, you can never expect to go thither. But, blessed be God for it, you are all as yet capable of attaining such a degree of sanctity, as to fit and qualify you for heaven and eternal glory. For Christ is ready to confer it upon you, if you will but come to him, so as to put your whole trust and confidence only in him for it. Indeed a stedfast hope and dependence upon God, is a certain way to accomplish any good and lawful enterprise we undertake. For God never yet did, nor ever will fail them that put their trust in him. How much more when we trust on him for the assistance of his own grace and spirit, to serve himself with a perfect

heart and willing mind, according to his promises declared to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Wherefore, in the name of him that made you, that preserves you, and hath redeemed you with his own blood, in his name I humbly pray and beseech you all, to hearken to your Saviour's call, and resolve, without any more ado, to go unto him. In order whereunto, I would advise you to observe these few necessary rules.

First, be sure to continue firm and stedfast to Christ's holy catholic church, and particularly to that part of it, which is established among you; and suffer not yourselves to be seduced, either into popery or schism, upon any pretence whatsoever. For if you either separate yourselves, or be justly separated from the church, which is Christ's body, you will be thereby deprived of all communion with him that is the head of it.

But, in the next place, think it not enough that ye are outward and visible members of Christ's church; but live up to the rules and orders of it, constantly using the several means of grace and salvation, which are thereby administered to you, prescribed by Christ himself as the way whereby to go unto him; such as fasting, and praying, and praising God, and hearing his holy word publicly read and expounded to you, and especially, receiving the sacraments of Christ's mystical body and blood, ordained on purpose for our more intimate access unto him, and communion with him, that we may partake of the influence of his holy Spirit, and of the merits of that death which he suffered for us. And therefore they who really mind the concerns of another life, cannot but look upon it as a great happiness, to live in a place where this holy sacrament is so duly and frequently administered, as it is here. And they who either totally omit, or frequently neglect it, will one day wish they had not; but then it will be too late.

Lastly, content not yourselves with the mere outward performance of these and the like duties, but perform

them heartily and sincerely, with your whole souls as well as bodies ; still believing and trusting on Christ, to make them effectual to the purposes for which he hath appointed them.

Do this, and then I dare assure you, in his name, that he will soon make good his word, and fulfil his promise to you. For he, by his holy Spirit accompanying the means, will so enlighten your minds, rectify your wills, and regulate your passions, as to sanctify your whole souls, and reduce them to a right temper and constitution, and then he will soon discharge and absolve you from all your sins, and give rest to your souls, not only from all evil here, but in God himself the chiefest of all goods hereafter.

And that ye may neither fear to come unto him, nor doubt of receiving such great blessings from him, hark, he himself here calls you with his own mouth, saying, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Oh blessed invitation ! *God, of his infinite mercy, grant that we may all with thankfulness accept of it, in and through him who hath made it to us, even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; to whom, with the Father and Holy Spirit, be all honour, praise, and glory, from this time forth, and for evermore. Amen.*

S E R M O N CXVII.

THE EASINESS OF CHRIST'S YOKE.

MATT. xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

OUR great Lord and Master, Christ, in the foregoing verses, calls upon all such as *labour and are heavy laden*, and bids them come to him, and to *take his yoke upon them*; that is, to become his disciples, believe his doctrine, submit to his discipline, and give up themselves wholly to be ruled and governed by him, assuring them, for their encouragement, that if they do this, howsoever uneasy, restless, and weary they were before, they should soon find rest to their souls. But lest they should doubt or wonder how that could be, considering it is a yoke that he would have them take upon them, which might be as heavy and troublesome as that which they laboured under, and were heavy laden with before; to prevent all such doubts and fears, he acquaints them with the easiness of that yoke and the lightness of that burden which he would put upon them. *For my yoke*, saith he, *is easy, and my burden is light*; where the word *χερσὺς*, which we translate *easy*, signifies also good, and gracious, and pleasant, and useful; and therefore the meaning of our Lord in general is, that whatsoever he requires us either to do or to suffer for him, may be both done and suffered with ease and pleasure; that he doth not invite us to a sour, melancholy, and disconsolate course of life, nor impose any

thing upon us that will make our lives uneasy or troublesome to us ; that all his laws are so mild and gentle, so gracious and benign, so far from having any thing of difficulty, much less of impossibility in them, that there is no man but may observe them if he will, with pleasure and delight, so as to find rest and comfort to his soul, as well as for the observation of them. And that is the reason why he brings in these words here, to confirm the truth of what he had said before. Before he had said, that they who take his yoke upon them, shall find rest to their souls ; and to prove that, he adds, *for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

But I fear there may be some among you, who may be apt to question the truth of this divine saying, though uttered by truth itself ; or at least may wonder at it, men's minds being commonly possessed with very dismal and frightful apprehensions of religion, even of the Christian itself ; as if it was so hard and difficult to perform the conditions required in the Gospel, that it is in vain for them to attempt it. And this, I verily believe, is one great reason, why so few set themselves about it in good earnest.

That therefore I may remove this prejudice, and suppress such vain and groundless fears, which discourage you from taking Christ's yoke upon you, I desire you, in the first place, to consider whose yoke it is. It is the yoke of Christ, *my yoke*, saith Christ himself. But is it Christ's own yoke ? A yoke that he hath ordered and appointed for you ? Then you may be confident it is a very easy one. For he who came into the world on purpose to make your yoke easy, certainly would never put an hard one upon you. He, who hath undergone so much for you, as he hath done, would never, surely, lay more upon you, than you are able to undergo for him. In short, it cannot be imagined that Christ himself, who laid down his own life to save us, should require more of us, in order to our being saved, than what we may easily do ; that he should purchase

our happiness at so dear a rate, and yet make it difficult for us to attain it. No ; he that considers Christ's infinite love and compassion to us, how desirous he is to make us happy, and how much he hath done and suffered for that purpose, cannot but from thence conclude, that he would never require any more of us, than what is both necessary and easy for us to do ; and, by consequence, that whatsoever yoke it is that he would have us take upon us, it cannot but be as easy as it is possible for it to be made.

Especially considering, that Christ himself here affirms it to be an easy yoke. *My yoke*, saith he, *is easy*. And do not you all believe his words to be all true ? I dare say you do. For whose word can you better take than his who cannot lie ? Doth not he know what you are all able to do ? Yes, surely : he having taken our nature upon him, perfectly, yea experimentally, understands its temper and constitution : so that he is thoroughly acquainted both with the disposition and abilities of all and every person that partakes of that nature. Inso-much that he knows, infinitely better than we ourselves do, what is hard and what is easy for us, what we cannot, and what we can do, if we will. And therefore he having asserted it, whatsoever opinion we have hitherto entertained of it, we may and ought now to be confident that his yoke is really a gentle and an easy yoke.

Howsoever, that you may more clearly apprehend, and be more fully convinced of the truth and certainty of this divine proposition ; I desire you, first, to compare Christ's yoke with other yokes, and you will soon find it to be so much easier, that there is no comparison between them.

First, compare it with the yoke, which Moses, by God's own appointment, made for his own people the Jews. That St. Paul truly calleth, *the yoke of bondage*, Gal. v. 1. *yea, it was such a yoke*, that neither the apostles themselves, *nor their fathers, were able to bear*, Acts xv. 10. Not to mention circumcision, and the

paschal lamb, what costly sacrifices were to be offered? what a multitude of rites and ceremonies were to be observed by them? It was very difficult to reckon them all up; how much more to perform them as they ought? and yet how difficult soever it was, all that truly feared God, observed them all exactly: as we see in the famous instance of Zacharias and Elizabeth, of whom it is said, *that they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*, Luke i. 6. where, by the commandments, we are to understand the moral law; by the ordinances, the Levitical or ceremonial law, which then was in as much force as the other.

Now those two righteous persons punctually observed both these laws, and were therefore accounted righteous because they did so. But what a difficult task had they and all that lived in those days, upon them, religiously to perform all and every thing that was prescribed in the ceremonial law? This was a yoke fitted for this stiff-necked people, and therefore made so hard and heavy, though it is almost a miracle that any of them were able to bear it.

But this law of ordinances, as the apostle calls it, is now abolished, or rather expired, together with our Saviour; it ceased in course, when his death, which was typified by it, was once accomplished. So that this heavy yoke is now laid aside, and our Lord puts no other upon us, than that of the moral law, which is nothing in comparison of the other, and only two sacraments, easy to be performed.

In the next place, consider the yoke of this world, what trouble it puts you to, to get the riches, or pleasures, or honours of it. How doth it often distract your thoughts, perplex your minds, and disturb you in your very sleep? What care have you all upon you to get wealth, and what fear of losing it when it is gotten? How do men commonly run to and fro, encompassing both sea and land for it? How do they impair their

health, consume their bodies, hazard their lives, and destroy their very souls, and all for that which can never make them either wiser or better when they have it ; and which they are never sure to get neither, much less to keep, after all their care and pains.

How incomparably easy is the yoke which Christ puts upon us ? He requires no such toil and travail ; no such carking cares and perplexity of mind ; nothing that can either break our rest, or endanger our health, or life ; nothing but what will do us, as well as make us, good ; nothing but what we may do with as much ease, if we will, as we can be willing to do it. And besides, we can never lose our labour in his service, as men usually do in the drudgery of the world. For if we do what he commands, we are sure to obtain what he hath promised to us. And therefore we may lay it down as a most certain rule, that it is much easier to serve God than mammon ; much easier to be good than to be rich ; and by consequence, that Christ's is a very easy yoke indeed, in comparison of the world's. Insomuch that if people would take but half the pains for heaven that they do for earth, they could never miss of it. If they would spend but the seventh part of the time in their general, which they spend in their particular calling, they would be soon as rich in faith and good works, as they either are or can desire to be in money.

But, in this place, our Lord seems to oppose his yoke and burden to that of sin especially, which is so great and grievous, that when men have once a true sense and sight of it, it lies so heavy upon their consciences, that without the almighty power of God, they could never be able to endure it. And therefore they are here said to labour under it, and to be heavy laden with it. As David was, when he cried out, *For my iniquities are gone over my head ; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me*, Psal. xxxviii. 4. But this, the hardest of all yokes, the heaviest of all burdens, Christ frees those from, who come to him and take his yoke upon

them ; which therefore must needs exceed the other in ease and gentleness, as much as holiness exceeds sin, or heaven hell. For his yoke, instead of lying too heavy upon them that bear it, gives ease to their minds, quiet to their consciences, and rest to their souls : well then might our Lord say, in this respect also, *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Neither is it so only in comparison of other yokes, but likewise in itself, in its own nature. Forasmuch as Christ requires no more of any of us, in order to our obtaining eternal salvation, but what is plain to be understood, and easy to be performed, by any one that will but apply his mind seriously to it, and take that course that he hath prescribed for it.

First, I say, the commands of Christ are all plain and easy to be understood, so plain and easy, that a child may learn them : for whatsoever he requires us either to believe or do, is briefly comprehended in our Church Catechism, which I hope to find by experience that your children can say, as well as you, yea, and understand too as much as is necessary for them. It is true, there are some great mysteries revealed in the Gospel, which you cannot understand ; but Christ therefore doth not command you to understand, but only to believe them, and that surely is no hard matter. For it is no more than what you all do every day. If a wise and honest man tells you a story, how strange soever it may seem at first, yet you will believe it only upon his word ; what great business is it then to give credit to what Christ, what God himself saith, who can neither be deceived nor deceive ? And yet this is all that is required of us in the high mysteries of the Gospel. He that only knows what Christ would have him to believe, and then believes it upon his word, whether he understands it or no, does all that the Gospel enjoins in this respect. And as for the duties which he would have us do, they are all so plainly set down in the holy Scripture, that he who runs may read them ; and he who hath any sense

or reason at all may understand them. For they are all expressed in the most easy and familiar terms that can be. Insomuch that if any of you be ignorant of your whole duty, both to God and man, it is not because you cannot, but because you will not know it. For if ye would but be half as careful and diligent to understand the will of God, as ye are to learn trades and callings in the world, you would soon understand that, far better than ye do them.

And as Christ's commands are easy to be known, so they are to be practised too, if men would but give their minds to it. For they are all agreeable to our very nature, and suited to that temper and constitution that we are all made of. Insomuch that all the joy and happiness we are capable of, consists in our due observation of them. For being designed at first to serve, and worship, and glorify him that made us, he therefore made us of such a frame and temper, that we are always restless and uneasy, but while we are doing the work he made us for, performing such duties as he for that purpose hath laid upon us: whereas all the while that we live according to his laws, in a due obedience to his commands, we live in our proper element, and so are at ease and rest in our own minds, and find a secret kind of pleasure and satisfaction in our souls, arising from the apprehension that we have done our duty, and answered the end of our creation; that we have pleased God, and that he therefore is pleased with us.

Hence it is that St. John saith, *that the commandments of God are not grievous*, 1 John v. 3. They are not so heavy as to sink down our spirits into grief and trouble, but rather lift them up to the highest pitch of joy and comfort. As David found by experience, when he said, *Thy testimonies have I taken for an heritage for ever, for they are the very joy or rejoicing of my heart*, Psal. cxix. 111. *The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than*

honey and the honey-comb, Psal. xix. 8, 10. And therefore he often professeth, that he delighted in the law, the statutes, and commandments of God, Psal. cxix. 16, 47, 70. Yea, so exceeding great was his pleasure and delight in God's commandments, that it over-weighed all his sorrow, and kept up his spirits in the midst of all the crosses and troubles he met with in the world. *Unless thy law*, saith he, *had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction*, ver. 92. *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me, yet thy commandments are my delights*, ver. 143. My delights in the plural number, are all the delights he had in the whole world.

St. Paul also was of the same mind, *I delight*, saith he, *in the law of God, after the inward man*, Rom. vii. 22. *And this is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world*, 2 Cor. i. 12. Yea, it is much to be observed, that all the persecutions that he and the rest of the apostles suffered for it, rather increased than diminished their joy and pleasure in obeying Christ's commands. Insomuch that they rejoiced *that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name*, Acts v. 41. *I take pleasure*, saith St. Paul, *in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake*, 2 Cor. xii. 10. Strange things for a man to take pleasure in ! yet when they are undergone for Christ's sake in obedience to his commands, that obedience fills the soul with such real and substantial pleasure, that it takes off all sense of suffering, and turns that also into matter of rejoicing ; so that howsoever grievous the suffering may seem, the pleasure that attends it makes it not only easy, but delightful. And seeing not only all the rest of Christ's commands, but those also whereby he enjoins us, if there be occasion, to take up our cross and suffer for him, afford us so much joy and comfort, there cannot surely be any great difficulty in observing any of them. For nothing

can seem hard or uneasy to us that is pleasant, nothing heavy that delights us. And therefore our Lord might well say, *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Especially considering that he hath not only fitted his yoke so exactly to our necks, that it is a pleasure rather than a trouble to bear it, but that he also is always ready to assist us in it. For he commands us to do nothing but what he himself will enable us to do, if we set about it as we ought, in his name. What is wanting in us, he will make up for himself, and supply the defects of our natural strength, with his own supernatural grace and virtue. A remarkable instance whereof we have in St. Paul, who having got a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of satan to, buffet him, and not being able to bear it by his own strength, he addressed himself to Christ by prayer, who gave him this gracious answer, *My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore, saith the apostle, will I rather glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* And then he adds, *therefore I take pleasure in infirmities*, &c. 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. From whence it appears, that the great reason why it was so easy and pleasant to him to do or suffer any thing for Christ's sake, was, because the power of Christ himself rested upon him, and assisted him in it. By which he looked upon himself as able to do all things; *I have learned*, saith he, *in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Every where, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me*, Phil. iv. 11, 12, 13. As if he had said, I can do all things that Christ requireth of me, by that grace and assistance which Christ himself vouchsafeth to me. Where, as he plainly ascribes the glory of all he did to Christ, so he reckons nothing hard or difficult for him to do, through his strength and power.

And as St. Paul did, so may we do all things too, through Christ which strengtheneth us. Insomuch that although, as Christ himself saith, we can do nothing without him, yet there is nothing but we can do by him. By him we can mortify our sins, and withstand all temptations to them: by him we can overcome the world, so as to live above it: by him we can so fast and pray as to be heard; so hear and read as to be profited; and so receive his blessed body and blood, as to have him to *dwell in us, and we in him*: by him we can love, and fear, and trust in God, and serve and honour him with a perfect heart and willing mind: by him we can *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*: by him we can be humble, and meek, and patient, and loyal, and charitable, and good, and just to all: by him we can do, and by him we can suffer, any thing that he sees good to lay upon us. Wherefore, seeing we serve a Master who will neither require more of us than what he will give us grace to do, nor lay any more upon us than what he will give us strength to bear; his *yoke* must needs be *easy*, and his *burden light*.

Howsoever, to make it still more clear, if possible, and undeniable, I desire you to consider, in the last place, that as Christ assists us in doing what he commands, so for his sake God accepts of what we so do, although it come short of what the rigour of the law requires. Christ's grace and Holy Spirit is always present with us, to excite, and influence, and assist us in obeying his commands; so that if we do but use and improve it as we ought, and as well as we can, there is nothing commanded by him, but what we may easily obey. But by reason of our natural infirmities, we cannot, or, at least, we do not commonly use and improve it so as to make our obedience perfect, but there are still some failures and imperfections in it, for which Almighty God might justly reject it. Wherefore, that nothing might be wanting to make his *yoke as easy*

and his *burden as light* as possible, our blessed Saviour hath taken care of this also. For he, both in his life and at his death, performed that perfect, that divine obedience to God, and merited so much for us, that he is able from thence to make good what is defective on our parts: insomuch that upon the account of his merits and mediation for us, God is pleased to accept of our sincere endeavours instead of absolute perfection: and of what we can do by the grace of the Gospel, instead of what we ought to do by the strictness of the law, to the praise and glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, as St. Paul saith, Ephes. i. 6. And therefore St. Peter, speaking to all Christians, saith, *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*, 1 Pet. ii. 5. And therefore, whatsoever spiritual sacrifices we offer, whatsoever good works we do, whatsoever obedience we perform to the law of God by the grace of Christ, in and through him, God will accept of what we do, notwithstanding the many imperfections there may be in it. And this indeed is that which crowns all the rest. For hence it comes to pass, that we poor mortals upon earth may, by Christ's assistance, perform such obedience as for his sake will be as well-pleasing unto God, as the services of the glorified saints and angels in heaven are; for though our obedience be not in itself so perfect as theirs, yet it is reckoned so, by virtue of that which Christ in our nature performed for us. Which one thing duly considered, is of itself sufficient to demonstrate Christ's *yoke* to be the easiest that can possibly be put upon us: for now nothing else is required of us, but only to do what we can ourselves, and to trust in Christ for his assistance in the doing of it, and for God's acceptance of it when it is done; and if we do but this, we need trouble ourselves no further; for these are all the terms propounded to us in the Gospel, in order to our being saved. This is the only

yoke that Christ puts about our necks, and the only *burden* he lays upon our backs, which none of us but may easily bear, and therefore must needs conclude, that his *yoke* is indeed *easy*, and his *burden light*.

Now, what follows from all this, but that seeing Christ's *yoke* is so *easy*, and his *burden* so *light*, as he himself saith, and we have shewn it to be, we all resolve to take it upon us without any more ado. This therefore is that, which in his name and stead I would now advise you all to do, even to hearken to your blessed Saviour, here commanding you to take his *yoke* upon you, that easy *yoke* which he hath purchased for you with his own blood. And though he paid so dear for it, you may now have it for taking up, and together with it, all the glory and happiness which attends it. And be not disheartened at his calling it a *yoke* ; for though it be one, it is the easiest that he himself, by his infinite merits and his almighty power, could make for you : so that if it had been left to your own choice what to do that ye might obtain eternal life, you could not in reason have desired less, nor indeed so little, as he requires of you ; for it is no more than what every soul of you may do, if ye will ; that is all, be but willing, and the work is done. Do but once take Christ's *yoke* upon you, and you will soon find what ye have now heard to be true, by your own experience, even that it is very *light* and *easy*.

All the difficulty is in your taking it up at first, in your first setting upon a pious and religious course of life. That, I confess, may seem to be something difficult ; not from any thing in the nature of religion itself, but by reason of the corruption of our nature, and our long continuance in sin, which hath made it habitual, and in a manner natural to us. And it will require some care and pains to break off our old customs, so as to walk, for the future, in *newness of life*. And therefore our Lord himself elsewhere saith, that the *gate is strait, and the way narrow that leadeth unto*

life, Matt. vii. 13. that is, our first passage or entrance upon an holy life is strait, and the way narrow that leadeth to it. But when we are once passed through the gate, and got into the way, then all things will be smooth and easy to us ; and we may walk on cheerfully till we get to heaven.

Wherefore, that I may persuade you all to submit your necks to Christ's *yoke*, to give up yourselves wholly to his service, whatsoever difficulty you may fancy in it, I desire you to consider three things.

1 Howsoever difficult it may seem, it is possible for every soul here present to do whatsoever Christ commands, so as to become his faithful disciples, real saints, such as the Gospel requires you all to be, and such as many have been already. And why should not we be such as well as any other ? If we be not, the fault is wholly in ourselves, in our own corrupt wills ; we will not, and that is the only reason that we do not, serve God as we ought. Do but resolve, by God's grace, to set upon it in good earnest, and the business is done. For,

2. When ye have once taken Christ's *yoke* upon you, and made trial of it, you will feel it to be, as he saith, *easy* and *light* ; yea, comfortable and pleasant to you. When ye have once entered upon God's service, and are accustomed to it, you will find it to be perfect freedom : all difficulties will then be over. You will have so much joy and comfort, so much rest and quiet, so much pleasure and satisfaction in your minds, from your obeying and serving God, that nothing which he commands will seem hard or grievous to you.

3. If ye take Christ's easy yoke upon you, and bear his light burden, while ye live, you will get to heaven when ye die : and what can ye desire more ? for there you will have more than as yet ye can desire : for there you will be with Christ, with God himself, and be as happy as it is possible for creatures to be. And that surely would be a sufficient recompence, although ye

should spend your whole life in toil and labour for it :
how much more, when nothing else is required of you,
than what ye may all do with ease and pleasure, as
Christ himself assures us with his own mouth, saying,
for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

S E R M O N CXVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

1 COR. ix. 24.

So run, that ye may obtain.

THE prophets, the apostles, and the ministers of Christ, in all ages, have complained of the little effect their ministry had upon the people they were sent to : and we have as much cause to make the same complaint now, if not much more than ever : for though God's holy word was never more frequently read, more plainly expounded, or more powerfully pressed, for many ages, than it is in this ; yet there are but few that mind it, but few that are ever the better for it. I speak not only of those, who, according to St. Paul's prophecy, will not *endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears*, 2 Tim. iv. 3. But of those also who profess to believe and come to hear the good word of God, as administered by those who are sent by God himself to do it, there are but few of them that do any more than hear it : though they hear it over and over again, it is all one, they will not do it : though we tell them from Christ's own mouth, that *except they repent, they must all perish*, yet they will not do it : though we tell them, upon his infallible word, that if they *first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other necessary things shall be added* to them, yet they will not do it : though we tell

them, that it is their interest, as well as duty, to perform both their public and private devotions to Almighty God every day, and to serve him with reverence and godly fear, yet they will not do it: though we invite them in the name of Christ to come to his own table, and there feed upon his most blessed body and blood, so as to partake of all the blessings which he hath merited for them, yet they will not come: some not at all, and others so seldom, as to shew they care not whether they ever come or no; like those in the parable, who when they were invited by a king to the marriage of his own son, *they made light of it, and went their way, one to his farm, another to his merchandise*, Matt. xxii. 5. Thus the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, usually choke the seed of God's word, and make it unfruitful, how carefully soever it is sown. It rarely meets with an honest and good heart, that will bring forth fruit to perfection.

This may seem a severe reflection upon the age we live in, but I am sure it is true: there are none here present, who take notice of what is done in the world, but know it to be so of the greatest part of those they are acquainted with: many, I fear, know it to be true of themselves, that they have heard the word of God for many years together, and yet, to this day, will not do it. I judge no man, but leave every one to the judgment of God, and of his own conscience. But I desire you all to consider, what the Judge of the whole world saith, *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*, John xiii. 17. Whereby he hath assured you, that your hearing or knowing your duty, will never make you happy, unless you do it. But it will rather aggravate your sin and misery; for *to him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin*, Jam. iv. 17. He doth not only sin by not doing good, but he sins also by knowing how to do it, and yet not doing it; and so is guilty of a double sin, one in neglecting his duty, as it is commanded by God, and another in neglecting

it, although he himself knows it to be his duty ; and by consequence he sins both against God, and his own conscience too, and will fare accordingly in the other world ; where it will be more tolerable for those that never heard of the word of God, than for such as heard it, and yet refused to conform their faith and actions to it.

When I seriously reflect upon these things, I cannot but dread to think of the sad account that many of us will have to give at the last day ; and heartily wish, that I may be an instrument in God's hand to bring them to a better mind ; that, for the future, they may *be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving their own souls*, Jam. i. 22. that they may not be hearing and hearing all their life long, and all in vain, and to no purpose ; like those who are always running in a race, and yet never get the prize ; but that they may so run as to obtain, as the apostle here adviseth, or rather Almighty God, by him, commandeth all men to do.

For here we may first observe, he speaks to all indifferently, whatsoever state or condition they are in, as to this world, high or low, rich or poor ; as all are capable of it, so he would have all run. so as to obtain the crown, the *incorruptible crown*, as he calls it in the next verse, even eternal life and glory in the world to come. This is offered in the Gospel unto all ; so that all may have it, that will but take the care and pains they ought for it ; which the apostle expresseth by running for it, in allusion to the Isthmian games, where men used to run races for a certain prize, which was set before them : which kind of race being usually run near Corinth, the inhabitants of that city could not but be thoroughly acquainted with all things relating to them ; and therefore the apostle, writing to them, saith, *Know ye not, that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize* ; and then adds, *so run, that ye may obtain*. He takes it for granted, that they knew, that how many soever ran in those races, only one obtained the prize. But in this, he would have all run, so as to obtain it :

this being such a prize, that not only one, but all may have it, that will but run aright for it; for God is no respecter of persons; he *would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*, 1 Tim. ii. 4. and accordingly, *he so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*, John iii. 16. He excepts against no man, nor, by consequence, against any one here present; but every one of you may as certainly be a glorified saint hereafter in heaven, as he is now in this place, if it be not his own fault; God permits, he invites, nay, he commands you all, to *run* so as to *obtain* eternal life. And therefore, if any of you miss of it, they must blame themselves for it: and so they will, when it is too late; they will blame themselves to all eternity, for being such fools and madmen, as to lose such a glorious prize, which once they might have had, but would not. The remembrance whereof will be a great aggravation of the misery that you will then suffer by your own default.

This is a thing much to be observed, and I wish you would always carry it in your minds, even, whatsoever your outward condition may be at present, you are all, as yet, in a capacity of obtaining the crown of glory. This prize is set before you all, and you are all, and every one, required to run, so as to obtain it.

But then you must observe withal, that you must run for it, or else you can never have it. No prize was ever gotten by sitting still, and doing nothing; much less this, the greatest that ever was, or ever can be offered to the world. You must not think that it will drop into your mouths while you are asleep, or be forced upon you, whether you will or no. No, there is a great deal to be done before we can be *meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*, Col. i. 12. a great deal more than men commonly think of; who, when they have spent their whole life in nothing else but eating, and drinking, and sleeping, or else in getting money,

and perhaps using unlawful means to get it ; yet all hope to go to heaven when they die. But what ground can they have to hope for it ? None certainly ; no more than a man hath to expect the prize that other people run for, although he himself never runs at all, but stands stock still all the while ; such a one, be sure, can never get it : and therefore the apostle here adviseth all to run, that have any mind to obtain it.

And more than that too, he adviseth them not only to run, but to *run so as to obtain* : whereby he puts them in mind, that they may run so as not to obtain. And so, verily, many do : as our Lord and Master also himself hath taught us, saying, *Strive to enter in at the strait gate : for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*, Luke xiii. 24. But lest we should mistake his meaning, he himself explains it in the following words, saying, *When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us ; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are : then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets : but he shall say, I tell you I know you not whence you are ; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity*, ver. 25, 26, 27. These words are the more to be observed, because they were spoken by him who alone hath power to take in or shut out of heaven whom he pleaseth ; and he spake them of himself, as the master of the house which he hath prepared in the other world, for those who love and honour him in this : and therefore must needs know whom he will and whom he will not admit into it. And here he represents himself sitting, as he doth, at the right hand of the Father, and receiving into his heavenly house all that he knows to be his faithful friends and disciples, and as such are fit to dwell there. When they are all come in, he riseth up and shuts the door, that no more may enter. But

notwithstanding that, many other come, hoping to get in, but the door being now shut, they are forced to stand without, and knock, and beg to be admitted, crying, *Lord, Lord, open unto us.* And he from within, protesting that he doth not know them, they begin to argue the case with him, saying, *We have eat and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.* As if they should say, We have professed thy religion, we have conversed with thee in thine ordinances, we have eat and drank at thy table, we have been taught thy holy word, and have heard it, as commonly as if it had been preached in our streets. How confident are these people that they should get to heaven? But what saith our Lord to them? *I tell you, I know you not whence ye are. Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity.* Whereby he hath plainly forewarned you, that although you own him for your Lord and Master, although you hear his word every day in the year, although you receive the sacrament of his last supper, although ye live and die in the outward profession of his religion; yet, after all, unless you live accordingly, ye shall never be admitted into heaven. If ye continue in sin, if ye be workers of iniquity, whatsoever else ye be or do, it will all signify nothing; but ye must be undone and lost for ever. Nay, elsewhere he goes much further, saying, *Many will say unto me at that day, Lord, Lord, have not we prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?* These are great things indeed, and all done in the name of Christ himself: who can think but that these men shall be saved? They themselves may think so, but Christ doth not, for he will profess to them also, *I never knew you, depart from me all ye that work iniquity,* Matt. vii. 22, 23. From whence ye may see, that although ye call him your Lord and Master, unless ye do the things that he hath commanded, he will not own you for his servants. Although ye prophesy in his name, unless ye practise accordingly, ye must depart.

from him : although in his name ye cast the devil out of other people, unless ye cast him out of yourselves also, ye must go into that everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels. Although ye work miracles in his name, unless by it ye work righteousness too, ye cannot be saved.

Hark what he himself saith in the same place, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven*, Matt. vii. 21. How diligent soever therefore people are in seeking it, and how much soever they may do towards it, they can never enter into the kingdom of heaven, except they do the will of God. You may be sure of it, for Christ himself hath said it. And he said it on purpose that ye might take notice of it, and not expect that he should receive you into heaven when ye die, unless ye walk in all his commandments and ordinances while ye live. Without this, whatsoever course ye take, and how fast soever ye run, ye will not run so as to obtain : all your labour and pains will be lost, and to no purpose ; for ye will still be in the number of those who *seek to enter in, and shall not be able*.

God grant that this may not be the case of many here present : from your presence here at this time, I cannot but in charity believe, that ye all seek the kingdom of God, and desire to walk in that narrow path that leads to it : and so many do, as well as you, and yet, after all, come short of it : such are they that separate themselves, thinking to go a new way to heaven, which none ever went before : such are they that follow not the light of God's word, but that which they pretend to be within them, and so run just contrary to the course that God hath prescribed to them : such are they that do some things, but not all that is required of them : such are they that pray a little now and then ; but do not make devotion their daily exercise and recreation : such are they who often hear the word of God, but will never

do it : such are they who come to the holy sacrament, when they have nothing else to do, but suffer any worldly business to keep them from it : such are they who set upon a religious and virtuous course of life for some time, and afterwards leave it off again : such are they who think to get to heaven by the merits of Christ, without doing what he hath commanded ; and such are they who hope to get thither by their own merits without his. All these, and such like people, will seek to enter in, but shall not be able : they all run, but not so as to obtain. And I beseech you all to take heed, that ye be not found in the number of them, that your prayers may not be lost, and your hearing of sermons turn to no account to you : that your profession of the true faith, and all your endeavours after heaven, may not be cast away and come to nothing at long run : that ye may not labour in vain, but so as to attain the *end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls*. Or, as the apostle here expresseth it, *that ye may run so as to obtain*.

That the thing is possible, appears also from these very words ; for the apostle would never advise us to *run so as to obtain*, if there was no way whereby we might certainly obtain what we run for ; but the advice itself supposes and implies, that there is such a way, as will infallibly bring us to the kingdom of heaven, if we hit upon it, and run as we ought in it. This he takes for granted : and it is no more than what he himself, and many thousands besides, have found true by their own experience. In all ages some have run so as to obtain the crown of glory, and are now actually possessed of it in the other world. And why may not we do so as well as they ? Blessed be God, we, as yet, are as capable of it as they were, while they were upon earth ; they had the same corrupt nature to cleanse, the same enemies to grapple with, the same temptations to withstand, the same duties to perform, and all the same difficulties to press through, as we now have.

And we have the same Saviour, the same Scriptures, the same promises, the same sacraments, and all the same means of grace and salvation, as they had : why then may not we run so as to obtain as well as they ?

Nay, it is observable, that we not only may, but ought to do it : Almighty God himself hath commanded it, and so hath made it our duty, not only to run, but to *run so as to obtain* : and therefore, in his name, I beseech you all to do so. Do not content yourselves any longer with running on in a course of religious duties, with that carelessness and indifferency, which is so common in the world, as if it was no great matter how ye performed any duty, so that ye do but perform it at all. But do every thing that is required of you, with that intention of mind, that zeal, and earnestness of desire, that ye may attain the end of it ; that ye may really love, and fear, and serve, and glorify God in the world, so that when ye go out of it, ye may live with him, and enjoy him for ever ; that ye may not run in vain, but so as to obtain eternal life.

But how we may do this, is the principal thing to be here considered. The apostle here speaks only in general, *so run that ye may obtain*, without telling us particularly how we must do it, or what course we must take while we are in this world, that we may be sure to live happily in the next : Which therefore I shall endeavour to search into, and explain, out of this apostle's other writings, and the other Scriptures given by inspiration of God, who alone can tell us what he would have us do, that we may be saved. Which seeing the apostle here expresseth, by our running so that we *may obtain*, I shall keep as near as I can to the metaphor, which he, by the direction of God's holy Spirit, useth ; whereby to make this great work, the greatest we have to do in the world, plain and easy to all capacities.

First therefore, we must know in general, that Jesus Christ is the only way whereby it is possible for any man to go to God, to get his love and favour, wherein

all true happiness consisteth. *I*, saith he, *am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me*, John xiv. 6. Whatsoever high conceits we may have of ourselves, be sure the most high God is infinitely above us, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; *whom no man hath seen, or can see*, 1 Tim. vi. 16. Though he be always with us, and it is in him *we live, and move, and have our being*; yet we cannot so much as see him, much less can we, at least in our corrupt estate, have any access unto him, so as to find any grace and favour in his sight, without a mediator, or some middle person between him and us, by whom we may go up and make our addresses to him; but there is only *one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*, 1 Tim. ii. 5. But he being both God and man in one Person, by laying hold on him, as man, we may lift ourselves to God, and get into his favour again, as much as if we had never lost it; and so obtain everlasting life and salvation: but there is no way possible for any mortal man to do this, but only by Jesus Christ. Whereas he, as the apostle saith, is therefore *able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*, Heb. vii. 28.

As ever therefore we desire to be saved, we must go unto God by Christ, believing and trusting on him to make our reconciliation with the Father. And if we do that, he both can and will save us to the uttermost, in that he is our Mediator and Advocate with the Father, continually interceding with him to receive us again into his favour, by virtue of that great propitiation which he made for us when he was upon earth. So that by him we may all *run* so as to *obtain* eternal salvation.

For this purpose therefore your first care must be *to walk in truth*, as St. John speaks, in the Third Epistle, ver. 4 in that truth which Jesus Christ, who is truth itself, hath made known to you, without going aside

into the by-paths of error and heresy. You must *from henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*, in this age, as much, if not much more than ever, Eph. iv. 14. But ye must keep close to the truth, as it is in Jesus, firmly believing whatsoever he hath revealed, who, being your Saviour, would never have revealed it, but that it is necessary for you to believe it upon his word, in order to your being saved by him. Unless ye therefore *run* this way, ye can never *obtain*.

Nor this way neither, unless ye run also in the way of God's commandments; doing what Christ your Saviour hath commanded, as well as believing what he hath revealed to you; for, as the apostle saith, *if a man strive for masteries, yet he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully*, 2 Tim. ii. 5. As if a man runs a race, although he keeps all the while in the right way, yet he is not to have the prize, unless he observe all the laws and rules prescribed for it. So must you, in your Christian race, you must keep within the bounds which Christ hath set you, and do every thing which he requires, in order to your obtaining the crown which he hath promised to those who do so, and to none else. All others will run in vain, and, instead of getting the crown, will come off at last with shame and disgrace. But, as David observed, *then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments*, Psal. cxix. 6. As Zacharias and Elizabeth *walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*; and therefore were accounted righteous before God, and so obtained the crown, Luke i. 6.

But how can we do this? We that cannot so much as think any thing of ourselves, how can we be able to walk in all the commandments of God blameless? To that I answer, that the thing is possible, we cannot doubt, seeing others have done it before us: and why may not we do it as well as they? But how did they do it? That ap-

pears from the text itself : they walked *in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord* : they did not, they could not, do one without the other. They could not have walked in all the commandments, except they had walked also in all the ordinances ; but by walking in the ordinances, they walked likewise in all the commandments, that being the means whereby they did it ; for the ordinances were such positive precepts, which God had then enjoined them to observe, about their sacrifices and other rites and ceremonies, typifying and foreshewing the death and intercession of Christ, and so to exercise their faith in him, and by that means to receive grace and power from him, to walk in all the commandments contained in the moral law. If we would *run* so as to *obtain* the crown which they have now got upon their heads, we must take the same course : for it is certain, that without the grace and strength of Christ, we cannot make one true step towards it. Let us hear what he himself saith to his disciples, *I am the vine, ye are the branches : he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit : for without me ye can do nothing*, John xv. 5. whereby we are assured, that without him we can no more do good, than a branch that is cut off from the vine can bring forth fruit : that is, we can do none at all. But as a branch that abides in the vine, and partakes of the juice and sap, bringeth forth much fruit ; so if we, by faith, abide in Christ, and partake of his grace and Spirit, we shall do much good, all that is required of us ; *I can do all things*, saith the apostle, *by Christ that strengtheneth me*, Phil. iv. 13. And therefore when the same apostle was troubled with a *thorn in the flesh*, which hindered him in running the race that was set before him, he applied himself to Christ to take it out ; who gave him this gracious answer, *My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness*, 2 Cor. xii. 9. which doubtless was written for our learning, that we may know where our

strength lies. Not in our ourselves, but in Christ our head. In him we have both *righteousness and strength*, Isa. xlv. 24. strength to do what God commands, and righteousness to make it acceptable to him, when it is done. Insomuch, that how weak soever we are in ourselves, and unable to walk in the way of God's commandments, yet if we do but live with a constant trust and dependence upon Christ for it, he will carry us through the whole race, and enable us to *run* so as to *obtain*. Which therefore that we may do, in every step we take, we must still be *looking up to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*, Heb. xii. 2. and strictly observe the rule laid down by the apostle, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*, Col. iii. 17 By this means we may *walk in all the commandments of the Lord*, so that in him we shall be accounted *blameless*.

But that we may receive this power and strength from Christ, to *walk in all the commandments of the Lord*, we must walk also in all his *ordinances*, those which he hath ordained in his Gospel, to be the way that leads to him: such are fasting and watching, public and private prayers, hearing God's holy word read and explained, praising his most glorious name, and receiving the sacrament of his most blessed body and blood. These are all the ordinances appointed in the New Testament, instead of those many which were ordained in the Old: and unless we walk in these, in all these ordinances of the Lord, we can never walk in all his commandments, so as to be found blameless, and by consequence obtain the crown. These being those means of grace and salvation, whereby we may receive grace from Christ, to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, Phil. ii. 12. And unless we use the means, we can never attain the end. Herein therefore lies the great mystery of running our Christian race aright, so as to get the

prize, even by using all such means, as by God's appointment tend to it, heartily and constantly.

Ye must first, I say, be sure to use them all, one as well as another: he that runs not through the whole course, had as good stand still, and not run at all. He that useth some of the means, and not all, will lose his end, as much as if he used none; for that cannot be attained by any one or more of them by themselves, but by all together, influencing and assisting one another. By fasting, or keeping our bodies under, our minds are kept in a right temper and disposition for this spiritual exercise: by watching, we are always intent upon it: by hearing the word of God, we learn what to believe and do: by praying, we obtain grace to believe and do accordingly: by praising and magnifying the name of God, our hearts are raised up and fixed upon him: and by receiving his body and blood, our souls are strengthened and refreshed, so as to be able to run with cheerfulness and alacrity through the whole race that he hath set us, till we come to the end of it. And therefore if ye neglect any of these means, although ye use the rest, ye can receive no benefit from them, no more than as if ye used none at all: which is a thing I would desire you always to remember, that ye may not think to get to heaven, by doing only some things, unless ye do all that is required of you, in order to it.

You have great cause to thank God, that ye live in a church where all the means of grace are duly administered to you. Have a care that ye do not lose the benefit of them by your neglect and carelessness: but take all opportunities ye can get to use and improve them all, and every one, to your eternal advantage. Do not take up, as most do, with any one, or more of them, but exercise yourselves sometimes in one, sometimes in another, as they are administered, so as to run through them all. This is the way to obtain true grace and virtue, and, by consequence, the crown annexed to it.

But, for that end, whatsoever ye do, *ye must do it with all your might* : when ye are at your private devotions, ye must pray as earnestly, as if your life depended upon it ; for so it doth, your spiritual and your eternal life. When ye come to church, ye must lay all other business aside, and mind nothing but the business ye come thither about, even to serve and worship God, the Master of the house, the Lord and Governor of the whole world : ye must not stand looking about, and complimenting with one another : nor suffer so much as your thoughts to be running after your worldly affairs, nor any thing but the work you are there engaged in, the greatest, the highest, and the hardest work ye have to do in the world. All the while that ye are upon your knees, in prayer to God, keep your minds wholly fixed upon him you are praying to, and upon your Advocate in heaven, in whose name ye pray, and for whose sake only your prayers are heard and granted. While ye are singing psalms or hymns and praises to your Almighty Creator and continual Benefactor, be sure to observe the rule which the sweet singer of Israel hath set you, *sing praises lustily unto him, with a good courage*, Psal. xxxiii. 3. While ye are hearing the word of God, receive it not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God himself, *which effectually worketh in them that believe*, 1 Thess. ii. 13. All the while that ye are at our Lord's table, consider where you are, in the most special presence of Christ your Saviour ; and look upon him as in the midst of you, as he really is, and there communicating his blessed body and blood, to preserve your souls and bodies to eternal life ; and accordingly receive it by faith in his word, that by eating his *flesh*, and drinking his *blood*, he dwells in you, and you in him, John vi. 56.

If ye would heartily and earnestly apply your minds to the use of all the means of grace, and thus employ yourselves constantly in them, as ye have occasion, ye

would find them to be indeed the means of grace to you, effectual to your obtaining the favour of God, and such gifts and graces of his holy Spirit, whereby ye shall be enabled to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to keep all your passions in their due order, to love and honour God with all your hearts, to serve and worship him with reverence and godly fear, and to walk in all his commandments, as well as ordinances, *blameless*, all the days of your life, so as at length to go to him, and live with him for ever.

I add, all the days of your life, because, without that, all ye do will come to nothing. He that runs a race, unless he holds out to the end of it, can never get the prize. No more can ye, unless ye continue this your Christian course as long as ye live: for the crown is promised to none but such as do so. And therefore if ye desire in good earnest to have it, ye must follow the steps of the apostle; how far soever ye have gone, ye must forget those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before you, ye must still *press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ*, Phil. iii. 14. and never leave off, till ye are got to it. This, this is the way, the only way to *run* so that we *may obtain*.

And do not say, or think within yourselves, *that is an hard saying, who can bear it?* for how hard soever it be, it must be done, or you must be undone for ever. And why should you think that hard, which ye can all do if ye will? That is all, be but willing, and you will soon be able to do all that ye have heard: for it is no more, nor so much as men commonly do for the things of this life, and all, because they are willing to do it. If ye were but as intent upon the other world, as people generally are upon this, and as desirous of grace and glory everlasting, as they are of temporal riches and honour, you would think nothing too hard to do for

the attainment of it; but would do every thing that is required towards it with more ease and pleasure, than ye can ever find in prosecuting any worldly design. Do but make trial of it for a while, and you will find it to be so by your own experience. They who never entered upon this Christian race, may dream of a thousand rubs and difficulties in it; but when ye are once got into it, and have exercised yourselves for some time in it, ye will feel it to be so plain, so smooth, so pleasant, that ye will never think that they can run fast enough, and yet will never faint nor be weary, till ye come to the end of it: or, as the Scripture delights to speak, till you are *gathered to your fathers*, to the innumerable company of saints, who, while they were upon earth as you now are, ran so as to obtain the crown of glory in heaven.

Wherefore, my beloved, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God, Heb. xii. 1, 2. Where he is preparing a place, a place of joy, and bliss, and glory, more than we can imagine, for all that run so as to obtain it.

Let us therefore now resolve, by his assistance, to run for it, as others have done before, and some, we hope, are now doing. And why should not we do it as well as they? The prize is as free for us as it was for them. Let us therefore run with them, and strive which shall run fastest, and surest, without stumbling, still keeping the prize in our eye, that inestimable prize, the *crown of righteousness*, the *crown of glory*, the *incorruptible crown*, which the eternal Son of God hath purchased for us, with the price of his own blood, and

is always ready to set it upon the head of all that run as they ought for it.

Which God grant that we may all do, through him, who liveth and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God blessed for ever.



S E R M O N C X I X .

CHRIST THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.

JOHN xiv. 6.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

IT was a great privilege which the Jews had above all other people, that they had often prophets inspired and sent by God among them, to acquaint them with his will; and had always a certain way to know it upon any great occasion: for if they did but go to the high-priest, he putting on the breastplate of judgment, by the Urim and Thummim in it, perfectly understood the mind of God in the business they came about, and accordingly gave his responses or answers to it. We have no such way of consulting Almighty God under the Gospel: and the reason is, because we have no need or occasion for it; for now God himself, in the form and likeness of man, hath with his own mouth revealed all things to us, that are necessary for any man to know; and hath caused such his oracles, or divine revelations, to be committed to writing, and left upon record, that all may freely consult them, and from thence be informed of his will and pleasure in all things, wherein any man can be under any obligation or necessity to know it: so that if there be any doubt, scruple, or difficulty, which cannot be resolved from something that is there said

and delivered to us by God himself, we may certainly conclude, that it is God's will that we should not trouble our heads about it : for he, be sure, who came into the world on purpose to make and to shew us the way to happiness and salvation, hath told us all things that he would have us know, in order to our obtaining of it. And therefore what he hath told us, we may be confident it is no matter whether we know it or no : and that he would have us lay aside all such impertinent and unnecessary questions which he hath not seen good to determine, and to apply ourselves wholly to the study of such great truths as he hath revealed to us, and to take them upon his word : looking upon that as the answer of God to all such questions which we are any way concerned to be resolved in. And if we thus consult his oracles upon any such question, we may there find as clear and certain a solution of it, as the thing is capable of.

As for example, the chief thing that we all ought to enquire after is, the way whereby we may go to him that made us, so as to have his love and favour, in which our life and happiness consisteth. This is that which Moses, when he had the nearest access that ever mortal had to God, desired to know of him, saying, *I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight*, Exod. xxxiii. 13. Where he plainly desired to know the way which God had appointed, whereby men might come to the right knowledge of him, and find grace and favour with him. Which he afterwards expressed, by saying, *I beseech thee shew me thy glory*, ver. 18. this being the way whereby God designed to manifest the glory of his grace and truth to mankind : in answer to which request, the Lord said to him, *I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee*, ver. 19. and accordingly, *the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and*

gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7 which words being so solemnly proclaimed by Almighty God himself, there must needs be more in them than what is commonly thought of. To me the whole mystery of the Gospel seems to be contained in them, the wonderful way which God hath made for the reconciling himself unto mankind, by his Son Jesus Christ. It is in him that God hath promised to be gracious and merciful to them. It is in him that all such promises are *yea* and *Amen*. It is in him that he is *abundant in goodness and truth*; for goodness or *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*, John i. 17. It is in him that God forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; and yet by no means clears the guilty, or rather, will not suffer sin to go altogether unpunished: for he hath laid the punishment of it upon him; visiting the iniquities of mankind upon his Son, as he visiteth *the iniquities of the fathers upon their children, and their children's children, unto the third and fourth generation*; even in the highest manner that could be, so as to have full and complete satisfaction made unto him for them. Thus God shewed Moses his way how to find grace in his sight, even by Christ the Saviour of the world: according to the request that Moses had made to him: and thus David prayed to God, that his *way might be known upon earth, and his saving health*, or, as the word signifies, *his salvation, unto all people*, Psal. lxvii. 2. Even that way, whereby they might all be saved, by Christ the promised seed, who is our only Saviour, for there is *no salvation in any other*, Acts iv. 12. But he is not only our Saviour, but *salvation* itself, Luke ii. 30.

Thus even in the Old Testament God was pleased to

shew men the way of salvation, at least so much of it, as rendered them inexcusable unless they walked in it. But in the New, it is made as plain as words can make it: so that if we do but consult the oracles of God, which are there recorded, we cannot miss of it, but may have it from his own infallible word, how we may come to him so as to be eternally happy in him. This he hath there often told us with his own divine mouth: particularly in my text, where the eternal God our Saviour expressly saith, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

The occasion of his uttering this divine sentence was this: he being now to leave this world, lest his disciples should be overwhelmed with too much grief and sorrow for his departure from them, he acquainted them, that he was only going home to his own Father's house, and that he went thither to prepare a place for them, and all that should believe in him. And that afterwards he would come again and receive them to himself, to live with him for ever, ver. 1, 2, 3. When he had said this, taking it for granted that they all understood him, he adds, *and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know*, ver. 4. But St. Thomas, one of the twelve, not apprehending his meaning aright, said, *Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?* ver 5. Upon which our blessed Saviour, according to his usual way of replying to any thing which was said to him, so as to utter something at the same time, that should not be only pertinent to that particular purpose, but likewise of universal consequence and necessary for all mankind to know; he took occasion to utter this divine oracle, *I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* Whereby he certified both that apostle and all other men, not only whither he was going, even unto the Father, but likewise of the way whereby they may go after him, so as at last to come unto him, even by himself. And the better to assure them of it, he doth not only

say, *I am the way*, but adds, *I am the truth, and the life*. That is, the true and living way in the highest manner that can be, in the very abstract, the truth and the life itself: so that we may certainly depend upon him as the way unto the Father, seeing he is the truth, and not doubt but he can carry us through that way, and bring us to the end of it, seeing he is the life too, and so can quicken, actuate, and enable us to walk in that way without fainting or stumbling. And that we may know that he is not only the way, but the only way, he adds, *no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*.

But that we may both fully understand and be duly affected with this great truth, uttered by him who is the truth itself, it will be necessary to consider, what he means by coming to the Father, and how he himself is the way, and the only way, so that *no man cometh to the Father but by him*, and that by him any man may come unto the Father.

Who is here meant by the Father, we all know, even the most high God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, whom our Lord Jesus Christ, being his only-begotten Son, usually calls his Father, and in general the Father, as in my text: where coming to the Father by him, is the same which elsewhere is expressed by *coming unto God by him*, Heb. vii. 25. But what it is for men to come to God, is not so easy to be understood.

For he, whom we call God, is an immense, infinite, eternal, incomprehensible Being, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto, *whom no man hath seen nor can see*, 1 Tim. vi. 16. How then can any man ever come to him? We little worms, that creep and crawl upon the surface of the earth, how can we come to him that made both heaven and earth? to him whose glory the *heaven of heavens is not able to contain*? We who cannot get up so far as to the sun, or moon, or any of the stars, how can we ever come at him, who created and upholds them all by the power of

his word, and is infinitely more above them, than they are above us? Our very thoughts, at their utmost stretch, at the greatest height they are able to ascend, are so far from reaching him, that we cannot think aright of him, but as of one that is infinitely above the highest of our thoughts. How then can we come to him? or so much as think what it is to do so? especially seeing that we are not only finite, and, as such, infinitely below him, but are likewise corrupted and defiled, and, as such, directly contrary to him. He is a most pure, just, and holy act, purity, justice, holiness itself: we are all impure, unrighteous, and sinful creatures: how then can we approach to him? We that are rotten stubble, how can we come near him that is a consuming fire? We could never have thought it possible, if he himself had not told us it is. And now he hath told us of it, we could never have understood what he means by our coming unto him, unless he himself had explained it to us; but now he hath made it plain and easy to us, by acquainting us how we may do it, even by Jesus Christ, who being the only way whereby we can come unto the Father, we can never understand what it is to come unto the Father any other way than by considering how we may know it by him who here saith, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me.*

First, therefore, it is by Jesus Christ, and him only, that any man can come to the knowledge of God the Father: though we have still, even in our corrupt estate, some general and confused notions of such a Being presiding over the world; yet we could never have known what he is, or what we ought to believe concerning him, if Jesus Christ had not revealed him to us; as but too plainly appears; for those in the East and West Indies, who never had his revelations any way imparted to them, before Christians came among them, what unaccountable and absurd notions had they of God? what strange and ridiculous resemblances did

they make of him? some making him like one thing, some like another; some representing him under the finest, others under the ugliest shape they could think of; and all imagining him like something or other which they could see. The same was the case also of the old heathens, and of all mankind, that never had any other knowledge of God, than what corrupt nature, or their own natural reason, suggested to them; though they *knew God*, or that there was such a Being in the world, yet they did not *glorify him as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: professing themselves to be wise, they became foolish, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things*, Rom. i. 21, 22, 23.

It is from such as these, that we must gather what to think of that natural religion which is so much cried up by some in our days, in opposition to the revealed: whatsoever they may pretend, there is nothing of true religion in it; forasmuch as mankind, by nature, have no true knowledge of the God they ought to worship, much less can they perform such worship to him, which may be properly called religion: for nothing that men do can be truly called the worshipping of God, unless it be done according to his will. But how can they know that, unless he himself hath revealed it to them? Hence it is, that they who do not believe, that God hath revealed himself and his will to mankind, as well as they who never heard of any such revelations, they all live as without God in the world; and so would all mankind have always lived, but for Jesus Christ our Lord.

But Jesus Christ our Lord hath made known all that is necessary, or indeed possible for mankind in this imperfect state to know, concerning God and the Father: this he did of old by his Spirit in the prophets, 1 Pet. i. 11 and hath since done it in his own per-

son, and by his evangelists and apostles in the New Testament. And that we may be sure it is he, and he alone, that hath done it, he himself hath assured us of it with his own mouth, saying, *No man knoweth the Son, but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him*, Matt. xi. 27. And by his Evangelist, saying, *No man hath seen God at any time ; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*, John i. 18. He who alone could do it, as being the only-begotten of the Father, of the same form or nature with him, he hath declared, he hath revealed all that we need to know or believe concerning God, to our serving him in this world, and to our enjoyment of him in the next : and therefore he is properly called the *Sun of righteousness*, Mal. iv. 2. and *the light of the world*, John viii. 12. xix. 5. *the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*, chap. i. 9. It being only by him that any man can see God, or any thing relating to the other world, as it is by the light of the sun that we see the things of this world.

And as the light of the sun hath always heat and vigour going along with it ; so hath the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ : it hath so much power and efficacy, that he, by it, doth not only enlighten the medium, but the eye, the eye of our minds, that we may see the wondrous things that are written in the law of God : as he opened his apostles' *understandings, that they might understand the Scripture*, Luke xxiv. 45. and Lydia's heart, so that she *attended to the things which were spoken of Paul*, Acts xvi. 14. so if we consult the oracles of Christ, and keep our eye fixed on him, he will not only shew us what we ought to believe and know of God, but likewise open our hearts to receive and digest it ; so that our whole souls shall be overspread with a quick sense and feeling of it. I do not say, that we shall be able to comprehend his divine

nature and properties, so as to form any clear ideas or notions of him in our brains, as he is in himself: for that is impossible for us mortals to do, who have no capacities for it. And therefore they who pretend to it, or attempt it, are guilty of high presumption, and betray their pride and folly as much, nay more, than if they should endeavour to grasp the whole heavens within the palms of their hands; be sure they have no true knowledge of God; for they know not so much of him, as that he is incomprehensible, and infinitely beyond the reach of their finite understandings: whereas the knowledge of God, which we are taught by Jesus Christ in his holy word, is quite of another nature. It consists not in having ideas and speculations of him in our heads; but in having such a quick and lively sense of him in our hearts, that our whole souls are filled with admiration, and love, and fear of his divine perfections, so that we *taste the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come*, Heb. vi. 5. and know so as to taste that the *Lord is gracious*, 1 Pet. ii. 3. feeling ourselves touched to the quick, and strangely affected with his glory, power, and goodness, beyond what we ourselves are able to conceive, much less express to other people.

Thus, therefore, Christ is the way to know God effectually; to know that he is Jehovah; being itself, existing in and of himself, and giving existence to all things else; that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, these three are this one Jehovah: that he is *from everlasting to everlasting, God blessed for ever*: that he is every where, knows all things, and can do what he will: that he made all things by the word of his power, and still upholds and governs all things according to the pleasure of his will; that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without him; and that the very hairs of every man's head are numbered by him: that he is the *Lord of sabaoth, the Lord of heaven and earth*, the Lord God omnipotent, that reigns and rules over the

whole world, and doth whatsoever he pleaseth in it : that he is the chief, the only good in the world, in whose favour is life, in whose *presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.* All this, and far more than I am able to express, we may all know of God by his Son, who hath revealed him to us, and still doth it in us, by his Spirit moving upon our souls, and imprinting what he had revealed upon our hearts ; so that we may read it there also, and be accordingly affected with it. But no man can ever attain to so much as this, even to know God and the Father, unto whom he shall come, aright, any other way than by his Son Jesus Christ. And therefore no man, be sure, can come unto the Father but by him.

But by him we may come, not only to the knowledge, but likewise into the favour of Almighty God, which is the main thing we come unto him for ; and that which seems chiefly designed by this phrase in my text ; *no man cometh to the Father* ; that is, no man cometh to him, so as to get into his love and favour, by any other than by me. And it is well that we can do it by him ; for we cannot imagine any other way how it is possible for us to do it.

For what other way can we propose to ourselves, whereby we can possibly find any grace or favour in the sight of God ? God, as we have observed, is an infinite, almighty, eternal Being, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Lord and Governor of the whole world : we, at the best, are a company of little creatures, that were taken out of the earth, and must return to it again. How then can we expect that he should have any regard to us ? *When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained ; Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him ? or the son of man, that thou visitest him ?* Psal. viii. 3, 4. Especially if we consider withal, it was he that made us, and that made us for himself, to serve and

honour him. But we have not done it, nor are capable of doing it of ourselves, having so far corrupted ourselves, that we are not fit for the work he made us for ; and therefore are justly fallen under his displeasure ; and never did, nor can do any one thing that is pleasing and acceptable in his sight : nothing but what provokes and incenseth him more against us, in not answering the end for which he made us. How then can we look for any kindness from him ? what can we do to deserve it ? and to which of the saints, to which of the angels shall we go, to restore us to the favour of God ? Others may think what they please ; for my part, I cannot imagine how all the creatures in the world can do it. I know there are many holy, many glorious creatures in heaven ; but how holy, how glorious soever they are, they are still but creatures, and, as such, infinitely below God, as I myself am. How then can I go to God ? What can I say to him ? How can I answer for what I have done to provoke him ? *He is not a man as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any days-man, or umpire, betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both,* Job ix. 32, 33. No, certainly, though we had ransacked the whole creation, we could never have found one that could lay his hand both upon God and us, and so bring us together.

But though we could not, God, by his infinite wisdom and goodness, hath found one ; or rather, he himself hath raised up one on purpose to do it, even his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, who being God from all eternity, of the same substance with the Father ; and having, in time, taken upon him the nature of man, by uniting it to his own divine person, and so being both God and man too ; as God, he can lay his hand upon God ; as man, he can lay it upon man ; and so, as God-man, can bring them together, and make them at one again. But, for that purpose, he being thus made flesh, he offered it up as a sacrifice for the sins of

mankind, suffering that death, in their nature, which they themselves must otherwise have suffered, every one in his own person, for the offences which they had committed against God ; and therefore he is called *the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world*, John i. 29. and said *to be a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world*, 1 John ii. 2. because in him, and by virtue of that propitiatory sacrifice which he once offered for mankind, God is become propitious, merciful, and gracious to them, pardoning their offences, and receiving them again into his favour, *to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved*, Eph. i. 6.

This, I confess, is a great mystery, such as could never have entered into the heart of man, unless God himself had revealed it. But now that he hath revealed it, as we have all the ground and reason that can be to believe it, so the whole way of our coming unto God by Christ, is thereby made plain and easy to us ; for though God being infinitely above us, so it is impossible for us to come immediately at him ; yet he having taken upon him our nature, so as to be God and man in the same person, by applying ourselves unto him, as he is man, we come unto God too, the same person being both. So that it is, as he is man, that he is properly the way whereby we come unto God ; he being, as such, the Mediator between God and us, as his apostle hath taught us, saying, *There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, having given himself a ransom for all*, as it is in the original, 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. As he is the man Christ Jesus, he is the Mediator between God and man ; and executes that office effectually by means of the ransom that he hath given for all men ; so that any man may now go unto God, though not immediately, yet by this one Mediator between God and him. To the same purpose is that of St. John, *If any man sin*, (as we all have,) *we*

have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ; and he is the propitiation for our sins, &c. 1 John ii. 1, 2. Because he is the propitiation for our sins, by offering up himself, as man, in our stead, he is therefore our Advocate with the Father, mediating, or interceding between him and us, that our sins, whereby we have offended him, being forgiven, we may be received again into his grace and favour. And therefore as he being the only Mediator between God and man, no man can come unto God, or the Father, as he himself hath said, but only by him : so there is no man but by him may come unto the Father ; for if we first go to him, he presents us to the Father, who is graciously pleased to accept of us for his sake, who brings us to him, and upon the account of that mediation which he maketh for us.

But how doth he present us ? Not in our corrupt and sinful state, not such as we are by nature, but upon our repentance and faith in him. He first washeth us from our sins in his own blood, purgeth our consciences from *dead works*, and purifieth us to himself a *peculiar people*, real and sound members of his own body, the church ; and then he presents us, as such, unto God. This he himself hath taught us by his apostle, saying, *Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, by the word ; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish,* Eph. v. 25, 26, 27. These words are much to be observed in this case, because they clearly shew how Christ, as man, presents us to himself as God, and so how we come unto the Father by him ; for here we see, that he having given himself for us, and so redeemed us to himself, he first sanctifies and cleanseth, and then presents us without spot or wrinkle, or any thing that may be offensive to God, and provoke him to reject us ;

but that we may appear in his sight holy and without blemish, though not as we are in ourselves, yet as we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones, as it follows in the text, ver. 30. *as we are joined to him*, as a wife to her husband, and so are under his covert, and endowed with his righteousness, as a wife is with her husband's estate and honour. For by this means, as the same apostle elsewhere expresseth it, we are found in him, *not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*, Phil. iii. 9. So that being found in him, members of his body, besides our own righteousness, which is imperfect, we have another righteousness, the righteousness of God himself, which being absolutely perfect, by that we appear and are accounted righteous before God, and he is pleased to accept of us, as such, in his Son, who being united to himself by faith, and therefore interested in his merits and righteousness, aforesaid.

Thus, although we *were sometime alienated and enemies in our minds by wicked works, yet Christ hath now reconciled us unto God, in the body of his flesh through death, to present us holy, and unblameable, and unreproueable in his sight*, Col. i. 21, 22. So that now in Christ Jesus, we who were sometimes far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ, who is our peace, Eph. ii. 13, 14. And through him we, both Jews and Gentiles, even all true believers, *have access by one Spirit unto the Father*, ver. 18. For all the sound members of Christ being led by one and the same Spirit, that which proceeds from him their head, by that they have access, and so come by him unto the Father; that is, unto Almighty God, who now looking upon them as righteous in his Son, is so far reconciled to them, that he is become their Father. And they accordingly come unto him as such. And that may be the reason wherefore our Saviour in my text doth not say, *No man cometh unto God*, but, *No man cometh unto the Father*

but by me, to shew, that by him we do not go unto God, as he is in himself, but as he is the Father, the Father of him our Lord Christ; and in him our God and our Father: who therefore commands us also to address ourselves unto God, always under that relation, as he is our Father which is in heaven.

But, *behold here what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God*, 1 John iii. 1. What cause have we to admire the *height, the depth, the breadth, the length* of this divine love. But how came we into so near a relation to the most high God? only by his Son Jesus Christ. It is he who gives this power to those who receive and believe on him, *to become the sons of God*, John i. 12. and so to come unto God as their Father: as one who hath a special love and kindness for them above all the people upon earth; and will accordingly take care of them and bless them; defend them from all evil, and make all things work together for their good; provide all things necessary for them in this life, and then bring them to their inheritance, *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them*, 1 Pet. i. 4.

For being thus brought into the favour of God by his only-begotten Son, in whom they believe, by him they come at last to his kingdom in heaven, there to live with him, and enjoy him for ever; and so *receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls*, 1 Pet. i. 9. To which there is no way possible for any man to come, but only by Jesus Christ; *for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*, Acts iv. 25. But *he is able to save them to the utmost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*, Heb. vii. 25.

These things I have endeavoured to make as plain as I could in so few words, both for your satisfaction and my own. There being nothing that we are more con-

cerned to understand, than what we ought to believe and know concerning that invisible, almighty Being, that made us and all the world ; and how, notwithstanding our manifold provocations of him, we may regain his favour, so as to be happy in him for ever. Now, as we have seen, there is no way whereby it is possible for any man to do this, but only by Jesus Christ ; according to what he himself here saith, *No man cometh unto the Father but by me.* And therefore if any man seek it any other way, he will be so far from finding any favour with God, that he will find God more incensed against him, for offering to come unto him, and seek his favour, any other way but that which he himself hath made and prescribed for it. The consideration whereof makes me sometimes pity the sad estate of those who *deny the Lord that bought them*, and so make themselves incapable of all those blessings that he hath bought for them.

But that, I hope, is not the case of any here present : you being all taught of God, that there is no way of coming thus unto him, but only by his only-begotten Son, your only Saviour and Advocate with him ; and therefore you must needs be solicitous to know what must be done on your parts in order to it, or how you may come unto the Father by the Son.

First, therefore, as ever ye desire to come unto the Father by the Son, ye must first come unto the Son, that is, you must believe in him, as he himself hath taught us, John iv. 35. Ye must believe, that he is the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, so as to be one with the Father, John x. 30. and that in the fulness of time the Father sent him into the world, to reveal his will to mankind, to reconcile them to himself, by dying in their stead, and so to be the Mediator between God and man ; and accordingly you must believe and trust on him, on him alone, to restore you to the favour and kingdom of God ; and you must love and honour him with all your hearts for it.

He that doth not this, doth not come unto the Son, and therefore cannot come unto the Father by him, but must *die in his sins*, John viii. 24. But God hath that infinite love for his Son, that whosoever loveth and believeth in the Son, is for that very reason beloved by the Father: *The Father himself*, saith he, *loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God*, John xvi. 27.

But then you must express this your faith and love unto the Son, by serving him, and doing whatsoever he hath commanded, John xiv. 15. And for that purpose you must keep close to the rule laid down by the apostle, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him*, Col. iii. 17. That is, whatsoever ye do, do it in obedience to his commands, for his sake, trusting and believing in him to direct and assist you in it, and to intercede with the Father to accept of it. This is to serve the Lord Christ indeed; and therefore whatsoever is thus done, is acceptable to God through him, 1 Pet. ii. 5. and they who thus serve the Son are so highly in the favour of God the Father, that he honours them for it: *If any man serve me*, saith the Son, *him will my Father honour*, John xii. 26.

Especially in all your addresses unto God, for any grace or blessing you desire, ye must be sure to ask it only in the name of his Son Jesus: for ye who have so often offended God, would never have been capable of any favour from him, unless his Son had merited all ye can desire; ye have no ground to expect any thing, unless ye desire it in the name and upon the account of his said merits, and the mediation which, by virtue thereof, he maketh for you: but that way ye may come to God, so as to obtain any thing that is good for you; for ye have his own word for that, saying, *Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*, John xvi. 23. And therefore in all your prayers, ye

must not only make use of Christ's name, as we do in all our Collects, but ye must keep your minds and your faith fixed wholly upon him, firmly believing that God, for his sake, will grant whatsoever you ask, that is really good for you, and then ye will be sure to have it, as sure as God's word is true, so powerful is the name of Christ with Almighty God. He is the Son of his love, with whom he is well pleased, and in whom he is therefore pleased with all those who come to him in his name. So that although no man can come unto him any other way, yet any man may thus come unto the Father by the Son.

And we, as well as any other. Let us therefore now resolve to do so, as ever we desire to go unto the Father, so as to be happy in the enjoyment of his love and favour, let us first go unto his Son, the Lord Jesus, so as to become his disciples indeed, believing and practising all that he hath taught us: and let none of us doubt but he will accept of us, seeing he hath said, *him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out*, John vi. 37. In humble confidence whereof, let us therefore, by a quick and lively faith, apply ourselves to him, and take all opportunities that we can get, of waiting upon him in his house, and at his holy table, that he may dwell in us, and we in him; that believing and depending stedfastly upon him, we may, by him, get up and come to God the Father, so as to have him to be our God, and our Father. How happy shall we then be? We shall then be fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God: we shall then abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and have his truth to be our shield and buckler; his grace will be always sufficient for us, and his Spirit ready to assist and direct us in all our ways. He will never leave us nor forsake us, but guide us by his counsel, till he receive us into glory. So that all things shall work together for our good, through the whole course of our pilgrimage upon earth, and then we

shall come to God in heaven, and there live with him, behold him, adore him, and-enjoy him for ever. And all through him, by whom we come unto him, even the ever-blessed Jesus, our only Mediator and Advocate: to whom be glory, now and for ever.



S E R M O N CXX.

CHRIST A SAVIOUR BEFORE HIS INCARNATION.

JOHN v. 17

But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

WHEN our blessed Saviour was upon earth, as never man spake as he spake, so never man did as he did: he went about doing good, the best that could be done; and that too, notwithstanding all the calumnies and reproaches that were cast upon him for it: which were so far from discouraging him, that he turned them also into opportunities of doing more good unto the world; for we never find the Jews saying any thing against him, but he still took occasion from thence of saying something for the better instructing mankind in the knowledge of God, of himself, and of the way that leads to life: as particularly in this place; our Saviour having cured a sick man (as he made the world) by the word of his mouth, only saying, *Rise, take up thy bed, and walk*, and this being done on the sabbath-day, the Jews began to rail against him, and persecute him, as one that had broken the sabbath, the day on which God rested from all his works, and commanded men to do so too. To which our Saviour answers, so as, at the same time, to reveal several great truths, which were necessary for them and all mankind to know. And he begins his answer with this divine saying, *My Father worketh*

hitherto ; as if he had said, Although God rested upon the seventh day from all his works which he had made, so as never to create or produce any more species or kinds of things out of nothing, yet he still worketh in preserving, governing, and disposing all things that he hath made, and that too upon the sabbath, as well as upon other days ; for he did not appoint the sabbath for himself, but for you to observe, by resting from your own works, not from his. You are still bound to do good upon the sabbath-day, as he doth every day alike : *he worketh*, in the present tense, and therefore continually, in every moment of time ; and he thus continually worketh hitherto, from the beginning of the world to this day.

This was a sufficient confutation of the Jewish cavil. Howsoever, he, out of his abundant goodness, took his opportunity of acquainting them with two very great and necessary truths : first, that God is his Father ; *My Father*, saith he, which he expressed so, as that the Jews themselves understood, (though the Arians could not,) that he thereby *made himself equal with God*, ver. 18. And, secondly, that he himself worketh continually, as the Father doth ; *My Father*, saith he, *worketh hitherto, and I work* ; whereby he gives us to understand, not only that he, as the eternal Son and wisdom of the Father, always worketh together with him, and doth whatsoever the Father doth, ver. 19. but likewise that he continually worketh also as he is Jesus, the Saviour of the world. For, as such, he spake these words, *and Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*. As if he had said, As my Father, the Creator and Governor of the world, hath been all along doing, and still doth, whatsoever he pleaseth in it, and whensoever he pleaseth to do it ; so I, the Saviour of the world, have always been, and still am working the salvation of mankind, continually doing all such things as are necessary to my bringing those who believe in me to heaven.

The consideration of which great truth being of extraordinary use, both to the informing our judgments aright, concerning our blessed Saviour, and to the confirming our faith in him, in order to our salvation by him ; I shall, by his assistance, endeavour to make it as plain and clear as I can unto you, by shewing, that he hath all along from the beginning of the world, and so before, as well as after his incarnation, been carrying on and accomplishing the great work of man's salvation. And for that purpose shall first enquire into what grounds we have to believe this truth in general, even that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of mankind, before he actually took our nature upon him : and then shall shew more particularly what he did all along for that end, that men might be saved by him ; and so how truly he said, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work* ; which being things purely of divine revelation, in speaking to them, I must confine myself to such arguments which are to be found in God's own word, that is, not only the most certain, but the only certain ground we have, whereupon to build any article of our Christian faith.

Now, in order to our proving that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of mankind, before he actually took our nature upon him, we must first suppose, that some men were saved before that time. This we may well suppose, it being that which all that believe the Scriptures agree in ; so that we need not insist upon the proving of it. But this being taken, as it must be, for granted, it necessarily follows, that Jesus Christ was then also the Saviour of the world, for there never was any *other way whereby men could be saved but by him*. This we are fully assured of by St. Peter, where, speaking of Christ, he saith, *Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*, Acts iv. 12. which words are so plain and express, that I do not see how it is possible that this great truth should be more clearly revealed to us : for if there ever had been any other

way, whereby mankind could have been saved, there must have been salvation in some other besides Christ, which the apostle here expressly denies, as well he might ; forasmuch as there is no way possible for men to be saved, unless Almighty God be first reconciled to them. But there is none could ever do that but only Christ, for *there is one God*, saith St. Paul, *and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all*, 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. From whence it appears, that as there is but one God, so there is but one Mediator between God and men, to make up all differences, so as to reconcile God to men, and men to God, and that is no other but Jesus Christ, who for that purpose gave himself a ransom for all ; which he need not have done, if any could ever have been saved without him.

And hence also it is that God, who would have all men to be saved, was pleased to make known the Gospel, or glad tidings of salvation, by Christ unto the world, long before he himself was born into it, yea, from the very beginning of it ; which need not have been, if men could have been saved any other way : for this we have the testimony of the apostle to the Hebrews, where, speaking of those indefinitely that lived before Christ's incarnation, he saith, *For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them ; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it*, Heb. iv. 2. For if the Gospel was preached unto us, as well as unto them, it was preached unto them as well as unto us : and the only reason, it seems, why any of them were not saved, was, not because the Gospel was not sufficiently preached to them, but because they did not rightly believe it. To the same purpose is that of St. Peter, *For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, and live according to God in the Spirit*, 1 Pet. iv. 6. To them that are dead, that is, to those that

were dead long before, as well as to such as were then alive, soon after our Lord's ascension: to them also was the Gospel preached, the same Gospel; for there is but one Gospel from the beginning to the end of the world; therefore called the *everlasting Gospel*, Rev. xiv. 6. And as St. Paul saith, *though we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel than what we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*, Gal. i. 8, 9.

Be sure the apostles preached no other Gospel than that which had been preached before by the prophets: St. Paul positively affirms, that he said *none other things than what the prophets and Moses did say should come*, Acts xxvi. 22. and elsewhere he saith, *εὐαγγελιζόμεθα*, we preach unto you the Gospel, even the *promise made unto the fathers*, that God hath fulfilled the same to us their children; for so the words should be rendered, Acts xiii. 32, 33. It was the same Gospel therefore that both the prophets and the apostles preached. What the prophets declared to be promised by God, the apostles declare it to be fulfilled in Christ. But still the Gospel, or thing promised, was the same in both: and therefore the apostles all along appealed to the prophets, to confirm the truth of what they taught; and so did Christ himself: *Search the Scriptures*, saith he, *for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me*, John v. 40. And after his resurrection, he said to his disciples, *These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me*, Luke xxiv. 44. where we may observe, that he appeals to all the three parts of the Old Testament, as bearing witness to what he had said and done. And then it follows, he *opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures; and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from*

the dead the third day : and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, ver. 45, 46, 47.

If our blessed Saviour would be pleased to open our understandings, as he did his disciples at that time, we also should understand the Scriptures of the Old Testament as they did, even so as to see all the great truths of the Gospel there also revealed and made known to mankind ; and particularly that which he himself here mentioneth, as the sum and substance of all the rest, even, *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.* For what doth the Gospel promise more than the pardon of our sins when we have repented, and grace to repent of them, that they may be pardoned in Christ ? yet our Saviour here speaks of both these things as revealed and promised also in the Old Testament. And so verily they are both together, Jer. xxxi. 33, 34. and very often apart ; as for the pardon of our sins by Christ, *to him*, as St. Peter said, *give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins*, Acts x. 43. And it is a great mistake to think, as some have done, that God promised only temporal blessings under the Old Testament ; for there is nothing more frequently promised there than the assistance of God's grace and holy Spirit to enable them to repent and turn to him, Isa. lix. 21. Ezek. xi. 19. xxxvi. 26, 27 Zech. xii. 10. Jer xxxii. 39, &c.

But to prove this, we need instance only in that famous promise which God made to Abraham, saying, *In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*, Gen. xii. 3. xxii. 18. In which one promise, both grace and pardon, and all the blessings of the Gospel, were comprehended : for St. Peter having quoted this promise to the Jews, the better to explain it to them, he immediately adds, *Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you,*

in turning away every one of you from his iniquities, Acts iii. 26. This therefore was one of the great blessings designed in that promise. But St. Paul, having occasion to speak of Abraham, saith, *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed,* Gal. iii. 8. where we plainly see, that pardon or justification by faith was all contained in this promise, and that when God made this promise, he thereby preached the Gospel to Abraham, the same Gospel which we now profess, and in which we hope to be justified by faith in Christ, of the seed of Abraham, according to the said promise or covenant; which, as the apostle there saith, *was confirmed of God in Christ,* ver. 16, 17. and so indeed are all promises whatsoever that God hath made to mankind: they were all made and all confirmed in Christ, according to that of the apostle, *for all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen,* 2 Cor. i. 20. And therefore not only that which God made to Abraham, but every other promise that he ever made to any man, supposed and implied Christ to be then in being, as a Saviour of mankind, and so was a kind of publishing or preaching his Gospel to the world.

To this we might add, that the prophets themselves often speak of preaching the Gospel. The word they use for it is *בשר*, which the Septuagint often translate by *εὐαγγελίζεσθαι*, the same word that was used in the New Testament for preaching the Gospel. And so it plainly signifies in several places, as Psal. xl. 9. Isa. xl. 9. xli. 27. lxi. 1. But I shall instance only in that of the prophet Isaiah, *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace,* &c. Isa. lii. 7 For this St. Paul himself interprets of preaching the Gospel, the same Gospel that he preached: where, speaking of those who are to do it, he saith, *How can they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that*

preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! Rom. x. 15. And then he adds, *But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?* ver. 16. which plainly shews, that the same Gospel which the apostle preached, was preached also by the prophets, and that the people were much to be blamed for not believing it; which they could not have been, if it had not been sufficiently preached to them.

But though some did not, others did believe the Gospel as it was then preached, so as earnestly to expect and long to see the promises accomplished. This Christ himself told his disciples, saying, *Verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them,* Matt. xiii. 17. The disciples saw Christ in the flesh, and heard him preach the Gospel with his own mouth. And though the prophets and righteous persons of old did not do so, yet they desired it; which they could not have done, unless they had believed, that he would come in the flesh and dwell among us, according to the promises that God had made them. And though they did not see those promises actually fulfilled, yet *they saw them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them,* as the apostle tells us, Heb. xi. 13. This they did by a true Gospel-faith, which is *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,* ver. 1. Thus Esaias saw Christ's *glory, and spake of him,* John xii. 41. Isa. vi. 1. Thus *Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day: he saw it, and was glad,* John viii. 56. Thus Job saw Christ, when he said, *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth,* Job xix. 25. He did not only know that Christ would stand at the latter day upon the earth, but he saw him as it were living at that time, as his God, or Redeemer; I know that my Redeemer liveth, that he liveth now. Thus Moses also

saw him, so as to esteem the *reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*, Heb. xi. 26. And wrote so clearly of him, that Christ himself said to the Jews, *had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me*, John v. 46. *Yea, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days*, and things belonging unto Christ, as St. Peter informed them, Acts iii. 24. And therefore they who did not believe, were justly accused, condemned, and punished for their unbelief, for their not believing in Christ, notwithstanding that God had so fully revealed him to them by his prophets. As appears also from St. John, where, speaking of Christ, he saith, *Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?* John xii. 37, 38. Where the evangelist, as well as the apostle, in the place before quoted, plainly interprets their not believing the reports of the prophets, to be the same with their not believing in Christ; which could not be, if the prophets had not reported Christ unto them so as that they were bound to believe in him.

But they, doubtless, were as much bound to believe in Christ as we are; for they had the same ground to do it that we have. The only ground that we have to believe in him for our salvation is, because we have the word of God for it, which is the highest and firmest ground we can have to believe any thing at all: but they had the same word of God for it that we have, and therefore must needs be obliged to believe in him, as much as we are at this day. And so, be sure, all the saints of God in all ages, from the beginning of the world, did: they all believed in Christ alone for their salvation as we now do, or at least ought to do. What greater expression can there be of faith in God our

Saviour, than to say, *The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation* : he is become, he is already become my Saviour, yea, my salvation itself, all things necessary to my being saved ; yet this was used by Moses, Exod. xv. 2. by David, Psal. cxviii. 14. and by Esaias, Isa. xii. 2. And by all in the same words, though they lived in ages so distant from one another ; which makes me think that this ran through the whole church of Christ in all ages, and was used as a standing form of expressing their faith in him, and their thanks unto God for him. How confidently also doth David call God his God, the God of his righteousness, his saviour, his deliverer, his redeemer, his light, his rock, his strength, his tower, his defence, his refuge, the horn of his salvation, and his salvation itself ! How positively doth he assert, that the Lord shall redeem Israel from all his sins, Psal. cxxx. 58. And as for our iniquities, thou, O Lord, shalt purge them away, Psal. lxxv. 3. **הַבְּפָרִים** thou shalt expiate, or make propitiation for them ; whom can he mean by all this, but the Lord our righteousness, that Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world ? How frequently doth he profess that he will trust in the Lord, and how earnestly doth he call upon others to do so ! What is, if this be not, to believe in God our Saviour ? For my part, I know not how it is possible for any of us to do it better. God grant we may do it as well ; for this is the way to be justified before God as they of old were, even by faith in Christ : and therefore St. Paul, discoursing of our justification by faith in Christ, brings in Abraham as a great example of it, of whom it is said, that *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness*, Rom. iv. 3. Gal. iii. 6. It was by this means that all the righteous persons, under the law, were made and accounted righteous, even by their believing in God our Saviour. And if we believe but as they did, we also shall be justified and saved as they were ; according to that remarkable saying of St. Peter concerning them,

but we believe, that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even as they, or, as it is in the original, καθ' ὃν τρόπον ἡμεῖς, after the same manner as they, Acts xv. 11. Which words do of themselves sufficiently confirm this great truth, that all who were ever saved, from the beginning of the world till Christ came into it, were saved only by him, as we hope to be; and by consequence, that Christ having been all along bringing men to salvation, he might well say, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*

But to understand this more clearly, we must consider, in the next place, the several offices which he undertook and executed all along for mankind, as he was a Priest, a Prophet, and a King. I place the priesthood first, because the other were founded upon that; for if he had not first, as a Priest, offered up to God a sufficient sacrifice, whereby to make atonement and reconciliation for the sins of mankind, he could not, as a Prophet, have revealed the will of God unto them, nor, as a King, have ruled and governed them according to it: for these are such mercies that mankind would not have been capable of; no more than the fallen angels are, who never having had a priest to expiate their sins, never did, nor ever will, receive any mercy at the hands of God. Which seems to me an undeniable argument, that God never shews any mercy but only in Christ, and for his sake; who having not taken upon *him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham*, by being made flesh, and having in that made propitiation for mankind, Almighty God, though he be not so to the fallen angels, yet he is propitious and merciful to fallen men, so far as both to shew them the way to life, and to enable them to walk in it. Both which God our Saviour hath done, and still doth; the first as a Prophet, the other as a King, but both by virtue of that sacrifice which he, as a Priest, offered for them from the beginning of the world.

It is true, he did not actually take the nature of man

upon him, and offer it up for a sacrifice, till about 4000 years after the creation. But the sacrifice which he then offered, looked backward as well as forward, to the time past as well as that which was to come, *for the remission of sins that are past*, as St. Paul saith, Rom. iii. 25. or, *for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament*, as the apostle to the Hebrews, Heb. ix. 15. And if for these that were under the first testament, then from the beginning of the world, when that testament was made. Which is so certain and undeniable, that the same apostle brings this as an argument to prove, that Christ needed not to *offer himself often, as the high-priest*, under the law, *entered into the holy place every year*; because if so, *then he must often have suffered since the foundation of the world*, Heb. ix. 26. which plainly supposeth, that this one oblation of himself, once offered, was sufficient to expiate all sin from the foundation of the world, and that no sin was ever expiated but by that. To the same purpose is that of St. John, where he speaks of some whose names were not written in the *book of life, of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, Apoc. xiii. 8. From whence it doth not only appear, that Christ, here called the Lamb, was looked upon as slain; so that his death was every way as effectual from the foundation of the world, as after he actually suffered: but it appears also from hence, that he from the foundation of the world had the book of life written, not only as he was God, but as he was the Lamb, *the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world*, John i. 29. yea, that *was the propitiation for the sins of the whole world*, 1 John ii. 2. And if of the whole world, then from the beginning to the end of it; otherwise it could not be the whole. Hence the prophets speak of Christ's sufferings as past, Isa. liii. 5, 6.

Neither will this seem strange to any that consider, that God, at the beginning of the world, said, *that the seed of the woman should break the serpent's head*,

and the serpent should *bruise his heel*, Gen. iii. 13. that is, that Christ should destroy the works of the devil, but that he himself should be bruised or put to death, in his lower part, in his human nature, as he was the seed of the woman. Which being then said by God, who cannot lie, it was as certain as if it was already done, or rather, it was already done in the eye of God, to whom all things are present. From that time forward, therefore, Christ was a propitiation for the sins of the world, by virtue of that death which he was afterwards to suffer. Afterwards, I say, not in respect of God, but only in respect of men, who are measured by time ; for whose sakes, therefore, God was pleased to appoint beasts to be slain, and offered up in sacrifice to him, as types and representatives of that sacrifice which his Son was to offer up unto him for their sins, until it should be actually done in their sight, as it was from the beginning in his. And hence it is, that all nations that have had any sense of religion left, have been always accustomed to sacrifice living creatures to the God they worshipped. Which custom having no foundation in reason, or the light of nature, could proceed from nothing else, but some general tradition which they had received from their common head, from Noah, and he from Adam, and Adam from God : for it could never have come into his or any man's head, to think that the taking away the life, which he gave to his creatures, should be an acceptable service to their Creator, unless he himself had been pleased to institute and ordain it ; as he did, to put mankind continually in mind of the great sacrifice which his Son was to offer for them, and of the benefits they might receive thereby. Which being, nevertheless, in process of time, very much forgotten by them, or not rightly understood, he was afterwards pleased to appoint such rites and ceremonies to be observed by the priests, about their sacrifices in the Levitical law, as would clearly represent both the death which Christ was to suffer in their stead, and

the great blessings which he procured for them by virtue thereof: for they, as the apostle saith, *served unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished by God, when he was about to make the tabernacle; for see, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount*, Heb. viii. 5. Exod. xxv. 9, 40. From whence we may observe, that when Moses was in the mount, it was there shewed him, how all things relating to the sacrifice of Christ were transacted in heaven; and he was commanded to represent them all in the tabernacle he was to make, and the service belonging to it. Now, to pass by other things, we find, that in the tabernacle he made one place, called the most holy, wherein he put the ark that had the tables of the covenant in it, and the cherubim over-shadowing the mercy-seat above it. After this he ordered, that upon every day of expiation, the high-priest should kill a bullock and a goat for a sin-offering, and should carry some of the blood into the said holy place, and there sprinkle it before and upon the mercy-seat, and by that means make atonement and reconciliation for *all the congregation of Israel*, Lev. xvi. 14, 15, 18. All which, being according to the pattern which was shewed in the mount, plainly signified, that Christ having offered up his sacrifice upon earth, went into the true holy place, into heaven itself, and there continually, by virtue of the blood he shed, makes atonement and reconciliation for all his faithful people, that God would pardon their sins, and receive them into his grace and favour again. And this he hath done, as our true High-priest all along; and therefore might well say, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us*, Heb. vii. 25.

And as Christ hath been always a High-priest, to make propitiation and atonement for the sins of mankind, so he hath been always a Prophet too, to reveal the will of God unto them. He is expressly called a Pro-

phet, Deut. lviii. 15. Acts iii. 22, 23. and may well be so, all other prophets being made and sent by him, as his amanuenses to write, and his heralds to proclaim, what he dictated to them. As when Samuel was made a prophet, it is said, *The Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiuoh, by the Word of the Lord*, 1 Sam. iii. 21. The Lord, by the Word of the Lord, that is, by his Son, who is often called the Word in the Old as well as the New Testament: it was by him, therefore, that Samuel had the will of God revealed to him. To the same purpose is that of David, *The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his Word was in my tongue*, 2 Sam. xxiii. 2. But that Christ, by his holy Spirit, moved the prophets, and spake by them, we are fully assured by the same Spirit in St. Peter, saying, *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, and what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify*, 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. He speaks of the prophets indefinitely, and so of all the prophets, that the Spirit of Christ was in them. Afterwards he saith, that Christ by his Spirit *went and preached to the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient in the days of Noah*, 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20. He therefore was a Prophet in the days of Noah, and preached then by his Spirit in him, who is therefore said to be *a preacher of righteousness*, 2 Pet. ii. 5.

But to prove this, we need go no further than the prophets themselves; for we there find Christ himself speaking in them, so as that the words cannot be otherwise understood, than as spoken by him. I shall instance only in such places which we are sure are meant of him, in that they are applied to him in the New Testament: as where he saith, *The Lord said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, Psal. ii. 7. Acts xiii. 23. Heb. i. 5. *Sacrifices and offerings thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering thou hast not required:*

*then said I, Lo, I come ; in the volume of the book it is written of me, Psal. xl. 6, 7. Heb. x. 5. Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, Mal. iii. 1. Matt. xi. 10. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, Isa. lxi. 1. Luke iv. 18. They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots, Psal. xxii. 18. Matt. xxvii. 35. They gave me gall to eat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink, Psal. lxix. 21. John xix. 28, 29. They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, Zech. xii. 10. John xix. 34, 37. Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, Psal. xvi. 10. Acts ii. 31. xiii. 35. There are many such places, where Christ spoke as plainly by the prophets in the Old Testament, as ever he did with his own mouth in the New. I shall name only one more, that is concerning the thirty pieces of silver, for which our Lord was sold, and with which they bought the *potter's field*. Now observe how it is worded in the prophet ; *And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter, a good price that I was prized at by them, Zech. xi. 13. Matt. xxvii. 9, 10.* The Lord who said this to him could be no other but the Lord Christ. It was he therefore whom this and all the prophets mean, when they say, *Thus saith the Lord*. And whensoever they were moved by the Holy Ghost to say any thing, they were always moved by him, as proceeding from and sent by the Son. To whom therefore we are beholden for all the revelations of God and his holy will, that were ever made to mankind since the beginning of the world. For as he himself saith, *No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him, Matt. xi. 27.* and therefore might well say in this respect also, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.**

And as Christ thus acted all along as a Priest and a Prophet, so likewise as a King, yea, as *King of kings, and Lord of lords*, 1 Tim. vi. 15. Rev. xvii. 24. xix. 16.

King David himself calls him his Lord, *The Lord said unto my Lord*, Psal. cxx. 1. Matt. xxii. 44. The Hebrew word is אֲדֹנָי, one of the proper names of God, which is often used concerning God the Son, as particularly by Daniel, where he beseecheth God to hear his prayer *for the Lord's sake*, Dan. ix. 17. that is, as we use to say, for Christ Jesus' sake, for the words cannot possibly be understood of any other; and therefore shew, that the saints of old prayed, as we now do, in the name of Christ. Vid. Eccclus. li. 10.

There are many places in the Old Testament that speak of Christ's kingdom as then in being. I shall mention but two or three. The first shall be, that where it is said, *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre: thou lovest righteousness and hatest iniquity, therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee*, &c. Psal. xlv. 6, 7. This the apostle saith was said to the Son, Heb. i. 8. And it could be said to no other; for he to whom it is said is called God, *Thy throne, O God*. And yet he is said to be anointed by God, by his God, which could be true of none but him who is God of Gods: and though he be God himself, yet he often calls God his God, Matt. xxvii. 46. John xx. 17.

Another place may be that in David's last words, where, after many extraordinary expressions, to shew the height of the matter he was now to utter, he saith, מוֹשֵׁל בָּאָדָם צָדִיק, which we translate, *he that ruleth over men must be just*, much too low and flat for such a lofty preface. But the words may, or rather, according to the Hebrew tongue, ought to be rendered, *a righteous person ruleth over men, ruling in the fear of God: and he shall be as the light of the morning*, &c. 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4. Which last words are acknowledged to be meant of Christ: and then the other must needs be understood of him too; and so are an illustrious assertion of that kingdom and government, which Christ the righteous even then administered over men.

To these we may add that in the second Psalm, where Christ is named, and which is applied to him in the New Testament, Acts iv. 25. xiii. 33. Heb. i. 5. there it is said, *I have set my King*, or, as the LXX. and some other translations render it, *I am set a King, upon my holy hill of Zion*, Psal. ii. 6. Christ therefore was the King that dwelt in Zion : but Zion was the place where the ark stood in the holy of holies, with the mercy-seat and the two cherubims over it ; from between which the Lord communed with Moses, *of all things which he gave him in commandment unto the children of Israel*, Exod. xxv. 22. Numb. vii. 89. Wherefore this must needs be the Lord Christ, it being he who was set a King in Zion, presentiating himself there, as sitting upon the mercy-seat, or throne of grace, and issuing forth his royal edicts from between the cherubims : and therefore it was he also, whom the same prophet means, when he saith, *The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble ; he sitteth between the cherubims, let the earth be moved. The Lord is great in Zion, and high above all people*, Psal. xcix. 1, 2.

It would be endless to reckon up all the places where Christ's kingdom is spoken of in the Old Testament. Neither would it be so much to our present purpose, as to consider how he exercised his regal power, in some of the most plain and sensible instances which are there recorded of it ; for which end, we may first observe, that when three persons appeared to Abraham, he addresseth himself unto them all as one, saying, *My Lord*, Gen. xviii. 2, 3. And that it was the true God, appears from his being called Jehovah, the Lord, ver. 1. But that it was God the Son he spoke to, appears from Abraham's saying to him, *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?* ver. 25. *For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son*, John v. 22. And it was the Son, who then, as a righteous King, executed his judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah ; for it is said, *then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Go-*

morrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, Gen. xix. 24. It was the Lord that did it, from the Lord; they were both equally the same *Jehovah, the Lord*; and yet so far distinct, that the one did it from the other; which cannot be otherwise understood, than that the Son did it from the Father: whereby he clearly manifested his supreme authority and power.

And so he did upon many other occasions: it was he that wrestled with Jacob, and delivered him from his troubles, for he that did it is said to be a man, Gen. xxxii. 24. and is called God too, ver. 28, 29. He blessed Jacob, and gave him the name of Israel, one that prevailed with God, ver. 28. Hos. xii. 3. And in his prayer for Joseph's sons, Jacob said, *The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads*, Gen. xlviii. 16. For it is Christ alone that is our יְהוָה Redeemer, and from whom all blessings come.

It was he that delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt, and led them through the wilderness. For he that did it, is sometimes called an *angel*, Exod. xiv. 19. xxiii. 20. sometimes *Jehovah, the Lord*, chap. xiii. 21. xiv. 24. and sometimes the *presence*, or rather the *face of God*, chap. xxxiii. 14, 15. that is, the Son, who is the *image of God*, 2 Cor. iv. 4. Col. i. 15. the express *image of his person*, Heb. i. 3. such an image, *that he who seeth the Son, seeth the Father*, John xiv. 9.

It was he that fed them, and gave them water, where there was neither rain, nor spring, nor river; *for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ*, 1 Cor. x. 4.

It was he whom they tempted in the wilderness, as we learn from the same apostle, saying, *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents*, 1 Cor. x. 9.

It was he that brought them into the land of Canaan; for the man that appeared to Joshua for that purpose was likewise *captain or prince of the host of the Lord*,

Josh. v. 13, 14. Which could be none but Christ, to whom *angels, and authorities, and powers*, even the whole host of heaven, are made subject, 1 Pet. iii. 22.

And when they were come into the land of Canaan, he was still their King; for when they desired another, he said, they had rejected him, that he *should not reign over them*, 1 Sam. viii. 7. And their kingdom is called *the kingdom of the Lord*, 2 Chron. xiii. 8. For the better administration whereof, he ordered the *Urim and Thummim* to be put into the breast-plate of the high-priest, that his subjects might consult him there, to know his royal pleasure in all public affairs of the kingdom, Exod. xxviii. 30. Numb. xxvii. 21 as we read they often did. But that the *Urim and Thummim* belonged to Christ, and that it was he that gave his answers from thence to all that consulted him as their King, appears from these words of Moses, *And of Levi, he said, Thy Thummim and thy Urim are לאיש המידה for the man, thy holy One*. So Christ is called, *Thou wilt not suffer חמין thy holy One to see corruption*, Psal. xvi. 10. And that it was he whom Moses there means, appears also from the following words, *Thy holy One, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah*, Deut. xxxiii. 8. For that it was Christ whom they *proved and tempted in the wilderness*, is plain from the words of St. Paul before quoted, 1 Cor. x. 9.

Thus Christ, for a long time, was pleased to manifest his regal power to and for his people, in a wonderful manner, that they and all might see and know, that it is he that governs and defends his church in all ages, so that the gates of hell never did nor ever shall prevail against it. But for that purpose he exercised this his power, not only for his church in general, but in every particular member of it, by ruling their hearts, and keeping them stedfast in the true faith and fear of God: this he did all along from the beginning of the world, when it was said, *that the seed of the woman should*

bruise the serpent's head: from that time forward he hath been always destroying the kingdom of satan, and erecting and governing his own, in the hearts of all that believed in him, mortifying their sins, and quickening them to newness of life, with such influences of his grace and holy Spirit, whereby they have been enabled, notwithstanding all the temptations of the devil, to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Hence it is that we read of so many righteous persons in the Old Testament, as well as in the New. They were all made so by Christ, and accepted of as such, only through him, whom God *hath exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*, Acts v. 31. They were both always in his gift: it was he that gave them repentance, and it was he that forgave their sins; as appears also from his saying, *that we may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins*, Matt. ix. 6. plainly implying, that he had this power before in heaven. And as he had it, so he exercised it upon all that truly repented and turned unto him, in all ages of the world: by him they were pardoned and justified, or accounted righteous before God. The prophet could call him, *the Lord our righteousness*, Jer. xxiii. 6. as well as the apostle, 1 Cor. i. 30. so that God the Father, ever since the creation, hath been always governing the whole world, and ordering and disposing of all things in it: so God the Son hath been always governing his whole church, and sanctifying, justifying, and at last glorifying all the true members of it; and therefore might truly say, as he doth in my text, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*.

Now, from these things, thus briefly touched upon, we may first observe the exact agreement there is between the books of the Old and New Testament; which must needs be all dictated by the same divine Spirit, seeing, although written so many ages, one after

another, yet they all agree in that which no man could otherwise have thought of, even that the only way whereby any man ever was, or ever can be, saved, is by *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*, Heb. xiii. 8.

From hence also we may see what reason our church hath to declare in her Articles, *that the Old Testament is not contrary to the New*; for both in the Old and New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. *Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign, that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises.* Art. VII.

Lastly, we may learn from hence, what firm ground we have to believe in Christ for our salvation, seeing he is such an almighty Saviour, that he is able to save to the utmost all that come to God by him, from the beginning, as well as to the end of the world. Let us therefore now resolve to do so: let us believe and trust on him alone for grace and pardon, and all things necessary to our salvation, that we also may join hereafter with the twelve thousand of every tribe in Israel, and with the innumerable company of glorified saints of all other nations, in that celestial anthem we find them singing in the Revelations, chap. vii. 10. *Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever.* Amen.

S E R M O N C X X I .

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN RELIGIOUS ASSEMBLIES
OF CHRISTIANS.

MATT. xviii. 20.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

IF our blessed Saviour was upon earth now, what flocking would there be from all parts to see him ' and if he was but in any part of this kingdom, how remote soever, which of us but should strive to go to him ! what haste should we make, what pains should we take, to get as near him as we could, that we might not only see him, but enjoy his company, and hear some of his divine discourses from his own mouth ! with what profound reverence should we approach into his presence ! how attentively should we hearken to every word that came from him ! how glad should we be to see him smiling upon us, and owning us for his servants and disciples ' and when we had been a while in his company, how loth should we be to leave it ! how apt should we be to cry out, as St. Peter did at his transfiguration, *Lord, it is good for us to be here !* Matt. xvii. 4.

This, perhaps, may be thought a vain and groundless supposition. And so it is, if we speak only of Christ's bodily presence : for his body is now in heaven, and will continue there till the last day ; and therefore we have no ground to expect that we shall ever see it upon earth till then.

But howsoever, there is a way whereby we may meet with our blessed Saviour every day in the year, and enjoy his presence as effectually to all intents and purposes, as if he now dwelt among us, as he did once among the Jews in our own nature. For though in that nature he is now in heaven, there appearing in the presence of God for us ; yet he that is in that nature, is always present with his church upon earth too : we may be confident of it ; more confident than we could be of his body being any where upon earth, if it really was so : for if it was so, we could hear of it only from men, who might be deceived themselves, or else might have a mind to deceive us ; and so we could never be fully assured that it was really Jesus Christ. But that he is always present with his church, we have his own infallible word ; for immediately before he went up in his body to heaven, he said to his apostles, as such, and by consequence to all that should ever succeed them in the instruction and government of his church in all ages, *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world*, Matt. xxviii. 20. Whereby he hath given them and us as great assurance as could be given, that although his body was now to be taken from them, yet that he himself would still continue with them, *πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας*, every day, continually, without intermitting so much as one day, so long as the world shall last.

But though he be present with his church in general, as it is here militant upon earth, where may we in particular meet with him, and find him present, upon any occasion that we may have to address ourselves to him ? This is a thing which we are all highly concerned to know, and therefore he himself also hath been pleased to acquaint us with it, not only by his prophets and apostles, but with his own mouth, in these words, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*.

There are none, I suppose, here present, but who have often read these words, or at least have heard them read

over and over again. But I fear there are but few that have taken that notice of them which they deserve, both for his sake who spake them, and for the matter contained in them : wherefore it will be worth the while to look a little more narrowly into them, and to consider both the true meaning of them, and the great use and advantage that is to be made of them, by all who firmly believe them as they ought.

For this purpose, therefore, we may first observe, that our blessed Saviour having here given us directions how to carry ourselves towards an offending brother, even that we first reprove him privately, then before witnesses, and if he neglect to hear them, then to tell it to the church ; and having assured us, that what the church doth in the case on earth, the same shall be done in heaven, saying, *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven*, Matt. xviii. 18. our Lord, I say, having said this, he takes occasion from thence to speak of all church-assemblies, where any of his disciples meet to present their petitions to Almighty God, saying, *Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven*, Matt. xviii. 19. As if he had said, As whatsoever is done in the case before mentioned by the church on earth, shall be ratified and confirmed in heaven ; so whatsoever any, though the least number of Christians, shall agree together to pray for upon earth, it shall be granted in heaven.

Where we may observe, by the way, that this promise is not made to such assemblies, where one prays extempore, for that which comes next into his mind, or upon his tongue ; for in that case, he himself that prays, doth not know beforehand what he shall pray for, much less can the congregation know it. And if they do not know it, they cannot possibly agree together upon what they shall ask, as our Saviour here requires they

should, if they would have it granted: and thereby hath plainly signified it to be his will and pleasure, that his disciples, in all their solemn assemblies, should use such prayers which they know beforehand, and have agreed together to have them presented to the most high God in his name; who hath here promised that such public prayers shall be heard, but not that any other shall be so. And hence it is, that his churches in all places and ages of the world, (till very lately,) hath constantly used set forms of prayer, which were agreed upon before as fit and proper to be offered up to God, and which the whole congregation, therefore, accordingly agree to ask of him, whensoever they meet together before him; as we now do in our public Liturgy: and therefore have Christ's own word for it, that what we so pray for upon earth, shall be done for us by his Father which is in heaven.

But now, lest this should seem strange, that what we poor mortals desire upon earth, should be granted in heaven, our blessed Lord is pleased to give us the reason of it in my text, saying, *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* Whereby he gives us to understand, that as he appears in the presence of God for us in heaven, so he is likewise present in all such assemblies as are gathered together in his name upon earth. And then it is no wonder if their prayers be heard, seeing he himself is there ready to receive them, and present them to his Father which is in heaven, who always hears him, and grants whatsoever he would have done in the world.

But that we may be sure to apprehend our Lord's meaning in these words aright, we must first consider who are here said to meet together in his name; and then, in what sense he saith that he himself is in the midst of those who do so.

The first may be soon dispatched; for it is plain from the constant use of the phrase in the holy Scriptures, that we are then said to meet together in the

name of Christ, when we meet for his honour and glory, according to his will, in obedience to his command, in the true faith of his holy name and word, with a sure trust and confidence on him alone for direction and assistance in what we do, for God's acceptance of it when it is done, and for his granting what we ask only for his sake ; according to the many promises which he himself hath made us, that whatsoever we ask in his name, we shall receive, John xiv. 13, 14. xvi. 23, 24, 26.

But in what sense our blessed Lord here saith, that where two or three are thus gathered together in his name, he himself is there in the midst of them, is a question not so easy to be resolved. Not that there is any difficulty in the words themselves, for they are as plain as words can be. And it is impossible that the truth contained in them should be more clearly delivered to us than it here is, which therefore we are bound, and have all the reason that can be to believe, and be fully persuaded of, although we are not able to understand how it should be : as indeed we are not ; no more than we are able to comprehend God's immensity or omnipresence, how he is in all places at all times, wholly ; which being one of his infinite perfections, there is an impossibility in the thing itself, that our finite understandings should ever reach it. So it is in what our Lord here saith : he instanceth in two or three, which are the least of numbers ; and so assures us, that where any number of Christians, how many or how few soever they be, so that they be but a number or society met together in his name, he is there in the midst of them. He doth not only promise that he will be, but he affirms that he is there. Neither doth he say, that his power, his grace, his blessing, his angels, or the like, is there, but that he himself is there ; *There am I*, saith he, *in the midst of them*. He speaks also indefinitely of all such assemblies : wheresoever any meet together, in any place of the earth, and whensoever they do so, although there be thousands or millions

of such congregations at one and the same time, and how remote soever they are from one another, yet, if they meet together in his name, he is with them all and every one alike.

How this should be, is a matter that deserves our serious enquiry. If we say, that he is in all such places as God, we say true : but that doth not come up to the point ; unless he was God, he could not be in so many places at the same time : so that this may justly be reckoned among the arguments which put his Godhead beyond dispute. But, as God, he is in all other places, as well as in such assemblies : whereas he here speaks of his being there in a more special and peculiar manner than he is elsewhere, *There*, saith he, *am I in the midst of them* ; not only as one among them, but as the chief and principal person there, who presides over, assists, influenceth, and governs the whole assembly. Which we having his own word for, we cannot doubt in the least of it ; and though we are not able to comprehend it, yet, notwithstanding, we are bound to believe it as much as if we could. But howsoever, that we may better apprehend what we ought to believe concerning it, and likewise what other grounds we have to do so, I shall, by his assistance, offer at some things which, by his blessing, may conduce something towards the clearer explication of his sense and meaning, in these words.

For this purpose, therefore, we must first lay down this as a certain and undoubted truth, which we all agree in, as the foundation of our whole religion, that there is but *one living and true God* ; that *the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost*, οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς, ἓν εἰσι, *these three* (in the masculine gender) *are one* ; (in the neuter) *one being* ; or, as he himself expresseth it in Hebrew, יהוה אחד *one Jehovah, the Lord*, Deut. vi. 4. Wherefore, although the Word, which was made flesh and dwelt among us, is said to subsist in the form or nature of God, before he took upon him the nature or form of man, and so is truly a distinct subsistence or person

from the Father and the Holy Ghost ; yet we must still apprehend and believe him to be the one only living and true God ; who, as he exerted his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation of the world, so he manifested his infinite mercy and truth in the redemption of fallen man. The same God did both : the same God that made all things by the word of his power ; the same God redeemed mankind with the price of his blood ; and so is both our Creator and our Saviour. And it is in this latter sense that he is generally to be understood in the holy Scriptures, written for our admonition, and in order to our salvation ; particularly in my text, where he saith, that he is in the midst of those who meet together in his name ; that is, he is there, not only as God the Creator, but as God our Saviour. As he is the Creator, he is every where alike, ordering all things so as may tend most to the glory of his name : but as he is our Saviour, he is more particularly in his church, ordering all things so as may tend most to the salvation of mankind. And therefore, when any are met together in his name, and so for the carrying on of his design in accomplishing their salvation, he is in a peculiar manner present with them, as their Saviour, to direct and assist them in it. He hath been thus present with his people in all ages, whensoever they met together in his name ; according to the promise which he made immediately after the promulgation of the law upon mount Sinai : *In all places, saith he, where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee*, Exod. xx. 24. Where any are met together in his name, there his name is recorded, and thither he therefore promiseth to come. But how can he, who fills all places, come to any one ? That he himself explains, by saying, *I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee*. He will come thither as the Saviour of the world, as the author and giver of all blessings to mankind, *in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed*, Gen. xx. 18. And so he will be there in another manner than he is

elsewhere, by blessing what is there done, and those who do it. Now, what he there promiseth in my text, he asserts to be always verified, that where any are gathered together in his name, he is there in the midst of them. Which therefore must be understood in the same sense, even that he is there as God their Saviour, to bless and sanctify what is there done, to their obtaining eternal salvation by him.

According to the foresaid promise, we find in the Old Testament, that what place soever he appointed the people to meet in, whensoever they accordingly met there in his name, he was always there too : insomuch that the place he appointed for that purpose was called *אהל מועד* *the tabernacle of the congregation*, or meeting ; not because the people there met together, but because God met with the people there : *There*, saith he, *I will meet with the children of Israel*, Exod. xxix. 42, 43. And that the people might know whereabouts he was in the said tabernacle, when they were there gathered together, he acquainted Moses with the very place where he would always be, even in the space between the wings of the cherubims over the mercy-seat ; *and there*, saith he, *I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee, from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in command unto the children of Israel*, Exod. xxv. 22. And accordingly we read, that *when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy-seat that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubims*, Numb. vii. 89. So that Moses was then an ear-witness of his being there. And indeed the whole congregation were often eye-witnesses of it ; for he appeared in the cloud that was over the mercy-seat, Lev. xvi. 2. by some extraordinary bright lustre, and shining in it ; so *that the glory of the Lord appeared to all the children of Israel*,

Lev. ix. 23. Psal. lxxx. 1. They saw the sacrifice also consumed upon the altar by fire from the Lord, Lev. ix. 24. And the aforesaid cloud sometimes dilating itself, so as to cover the tabernacle, and fill it with the *glory of the Lord*, as it did when the tabernacle was first finished, Exod. xl. 34. and also when the ark was afterwards put into the temple that Solomon made for it, at the dedication thereof, 1 Kings viii. 10, 11. These were plain and sensible demonstrations of his divine presence; from whence the people could not but believe that he was really there, and *sat between the cherubims*, as he is often said to do, 1 Sam. iv. 4. 2 Kings xix. 15. 1 Chron. xiii. 6. Psal. lxxx. 1. xcix. 1. and so dwelt among his people, as he himself promised, Exod. xxv. 8. xxix. 24. The word in the original is שָׁכַן, which properly signifies to dwell in a place: from whence the tabernacle is called also מִשְׁכָּן, *his dwelling place*, Lev. xxvi. 11. And the Jews call his divine presence between the cherubims שְׁכִינָה, the inhabitation or dwelling there, which they reckon one of the five things which were wanting in the second temple; but it was always in the first, which was built upon mount Zion, and that is the reason that God our Saviour is said to be set a King upon the *holy hill of Zion*, Psal. ii. 6. *To dwell in Zion*, Psal. ix. 11. lxxvi. 2. Isa. viii. 18, &c. *To bless and save his people out of Zion*, Psal. cxxviii. 5. cxxxiv. 3. xiv. 7. And *out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined*, Psal. l. 2. because he presentiated himself and manifested his power and glory to his people from between the cherubims above the mercy-seat in the temple, that was built upon that mount, therefore called the *holy mountain*, Psal. ii. 6. because the holy One of Israel was pleased in a wonderful and peculiar manner to dwell there.

By these things thus briefly hinted, we may understand how God our Saviour, in those days, was not only present in the place, where he appointed his people to

meet together in his name, but often vouchsafed them outward signs and tokens of his being with them. It is true, we have no such signs and tokens now, neither do we need them, as that people did, for we have Christ's own word for it, which is more than all such visible signs that then were, or ever can be given of it; we have it from his own mouth, not that he is only in one place, as he was then, but that wheresoever two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them. So that now we have a mercy-seat to go to, not only in one place, as they had, but in every place where we meet together in his name. Our Lord himself, the antitype of theirs, is now our mercy-seat; as the apostle assures us, saying, *that God hath set forth him to be* *ἱλαστήριον*, that is, not a *propitiation*, as we render it, but *the mercy-seat*, as the word signifies, Rom. iii. 25. but we can go to this mercy-seat, or, as the apostle elsewhere calls it, the *throne of grace*, Heb. iv. 15. wheresoever we are: for it is but meeting together in his name, and we may and ought to be as certain that he is with us, as if we heard him speaking, or saw him sitting and shining forth in his glory, over the mercy-seat, as he did in the old law. For we have a more sure word of prophecy for it; Christ himself hath said it; and so hath given us as great assurance as can be of it, and therefore we ought as firmly to believe it, and be as fully persuaded of it, as we can be of any thing in the whole world.

This is that which the Gospel all along most strictly requires of us, above all things else, even that we believe what is there written, especially what Christ himself hath said, so as not to doubt, in the least, but that what he hath said, is just as he said it is; and what he hath promised or foretold, shall accordingly come to pass, just as he foretold or promised it should, although we have no other reason in the world for it but his word, which is infinitely more than all other reasons put together: for, as he himself said, *heaven and earth*

shall pass away, but his words shall not pass away, Matt. xxiv. 35. and therefore he having said, *Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*, we must not doubt at all, but stedfastly believe, that whensoever we meet together in his name, he is as really there, as that we ourselves are so, although we do not see him there ; nor can expect it, now his body is gone to heaven.

It is true, after he was risen from the dead, continuing some days in his body upon earth, before he ascended up to heaven, he was several times pleased to appear visible to his apostles, when met together in his name ; as the same day he rose, at evening, the door being shut, where they were assembled, it is said, *Jesus came and stood in the midst of them*, John xx. 19. then they all saw him, except Thomas, who was not there. And again, eight days after, when they were met together again, and St. Thomas was with them, Jesus was pleased to shew himself in the midst of them again, ver. 26. in both places it is said he stood in the midst, according to what he saith in my text, *there am I in the midst of them*. And it is also observable, that at his second time of appearing visibly to them, he bade St. Thomas thrust his finger into his side, without which, St. Thomas had said, that he would not believe that he was risen from the dead, ver. 25. which plainly shews, that at the assembly, when the disciples told St. Thomas, that they had seen the Lord, Jesus was there also in the midst of them, and heard what St. Thomas said, although they did not then see him.

But though our blessed Lord thus shewed himself sometimes before his ascension to his disciples, when met together, in his very body, that so they might be eye-witnesses that he was risen from the dead ; yet now that he is sat down, in that, at the right hand of God in heaven, we must not think that his body also is present in any of the assemblies of his saints on earth, much less in all : for then it must be in many places at

the same time, which is contrary to the nature of a body; and therefore cannot be supposed of his, at least as to the substance of it. Which I therefore add, because I dare not deny, but his glorious body in heaven may have great influence upon those of the same nature with it upon earth. For we know, that all bodies have a certain sphere of activity about them, some less, some greater, some so great, that we are not able to conceive how far it reacheth: as for example, the sun, which, according to astronomers, is near a million of miles off, and yet we see what mighty influence and power it hath upon the earth, and all the bodies that are upon it, or in it. And yet this too seems but a small part of its virtue or sphere. But our Saviour's body, by reason of its union to the divine Person, must needs be far more glorious than the sun, as glorious as it is possible for matter to be made. And therefore how far its influences reach, or how the emanations which proceed from it may affect bodies of its own nature upon earth, especially such as by faith are united to him, and meet together in his name, we know not: neither is it necessary that we should, having no divine revelation of it. But this we know, that the same person whose most glorious body is in heaven, is always in the midst of those who meet together in his name upon earth; for this he himself hath revealed to us. He doth not say, that his body is there, but he saith, that he himself, whose body it is, is there. *There am I*, saith he, *in the midst of them.*

Neither is it necessary that his body should be there: it is sufficient that his Spirit is with them. St. Paul could tell the Corinthians and Colossians, that he was *absent from them in the body, but present in spirit*, 1 Cor. v. 3. Col. ii. 5. and the prophet Elisha could say to his servant Gehazi, *Went not my heart with thee?* when his body was a great way off, 2 Kings v. 26. how much more, where the Spirit of Christ is, there is Christ, although his body be not there; for the Spirit

of Christ, is Christ himself, the same God with himself. And therefore, when he promised his apostles that he would send them his holy Spirit as another Comforter, he said, *I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you*, John xiv. 18. he would come to them by his Spirit. So he doth where any are gathered together in his name. He comes to them, and is in the midst of them by his holy Spirit, as he is the Spirit of God our Saviour, working in them both to will and to do, helping their infirmities, guiding, and quickening, and strengthening, and assisting them in what they do, that it may be acceptable to God, and profitable to themselves: so that, as St. Paul saith, *they can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth them*, Phil. iv. 13.

That the apostles looked upon Christ as thus present with them when they met together in his name, appears from that solemn assembly they held in his name soon after his ascension, for the filling up the place that was void in their college, by the treachery and death of Judas Iscariot: for our Lord himself having chosen all the rest, they would not undertake to choose any one, but addressed themselves to him as present with them, that he would be pleased to direct them to the person whom he had chosen for that place; saying to him, *Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen*, Acts i. 24. and when, upon their casting of lots, the lot was fallen upon Matthias, they made no doubt but he was the person whom Christ had chosen, and therefore admitted him immediately into their number: which plainly shews, that they believed that Christ was in the midst of them, and had not only heard what they had said, but had also granted the request they had made to him.

And so certainly we ought always to do: whensoever we meet together in his name, we ought stedfastly to believe, as the apostles did, that our Lord Christ, according to his word, is there in the midst of us. We ought to believe it with that true Christian faith, *which*

is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, Heb. xi. 1 Though we see not our Lord there, we are sure he is so, because he himself hath said it. And therefore we must accordingly offer up our prayers and praises unto him, and to the Father only in his name, as there present with us. And so we do in that excellent Liturgy which our church hath composed, to be used in all our Christian assemblies. We all along address ourselves to God, as he is our Saviour, and there in the midst of us. And that we may the better do it, we, at the beginning, call upon one another, saying, *O come, let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and shew ourselves glad in him with psalms.* Whereby we are put in mind, that we are now in the presence of God our Saviour, or, as it is here expressed, the God or strength of our salvation; and should therefore worship him, and rejoice in him, and praise him, and magnify his most holy name, for the wonderful works that he hath done for us. Which we accordingly do in the Psalms, and Hymns, and Creeds: especially in the *Te Deum*, we celebrate his great glory and goodness to us, saying to him, as there present, *Thou art the King of glory, O Christ, thou art the everlasting Son of the Father: when thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb, &c.* We often also call upon Christ to have mercy on us: and in the Litany, after the beginning, we all along direct our prayers to him who hath redeemed us with his own most precious blood, beseeching him, our good Lord, to deliver us from all evil, and to hear the prayers we put up unto him; and then crying out to him, *O thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace, and have mercy on us. O Christ hear us. O Son of David, have mercy upon us. Graciously hear us, O Christ: graciously hear us, O Lord Christ; still*

calling upon him as there present with us, and ready to hear and help us.

Several also of the Collects are directed immediately unto Christ, (as first sunday in Lent, third in Advent, St. Stephen's, &c.) and all the other to God only in his name. For they all conclude with these or the like words, *through Jesus Christ our Lord*. Which is the same in effect with praying to him: for as he is a distinct person in the Godhead, the only-begotten of the Father, and as such redeemed us with his blood, and is now interceding for us, we pray in his name, and for his sake. But as he is God also, of the same divine essence with the Father, whensoever we pray to God, we pray to him as well as to the Father and the Holy Ghost. So that when we pray to God in the name of Christ our Saviour, we pray to Christ himself, as he is God our Saviour: and when we offer up our prayers to the Father in the name of his Son, as well as to the Father, though not as they are two distinct persons, yet as they are one and the same almighty and eternal God; who having been pleased to enter into covenant with us, and to promise to be our God, and our Father in his Son Jesus: in him, and as members of his body, we also call him *our Father*, and pray unto him under that notion, saying, as our Lord himself hath taught us, *Our Father, which art in heaven*: which is the same also in effect with praying in the name of Christ; forasmuch as it is only in him that God is our Father, and we can truly call him so. So that through the whole course of our public devotions, we do all in the name of Christ our Saviour, who is always with him, and in him our Father in heaven; and likewise with us when met together in his name upon earth.

Especially at the sacrament of his last supper, which he was pleased to ordain and institute in such a wonderful and mysterious manner, that we may there look upon him, as present with us, not only by his Spirit, but, as it were, in his body too: for he calls the sacra-

mental bread and wine his body and his blood : *This is my body, which is given for you ; and this is my blood, which is shed for you* : not as if they were so in their own nature ; for the substance both of the bread and wine is still the same as it was before ; but he expresseth it so, that we may the better apprehend, and believe him to be as really there in the midst of us, as if we saw his very body and blood before us ; and may, by faith, partake of all the merits of his death, as effectually to all intents and purposes, as if we ate his very body, and drank that blood which he shed for us, and so had it always running in our veins, to purge and cleanse us from all sin. Which is certainly the highest expression, and the best course that could be found out, whereby to possess our minds with a due sense of his most intimate presence with us, when we meet together in his name, as we always do, when we are at his own table : and therefore when we receive his most blessed body and blood, we join together in saying or singing that ancient apostolical hymn, *Glory be to God on high* : where we speak to him as there present with us, saying, *O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesu Christ : O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us, &c.* concluding with this solemn address of praise and thankfulness to him, *for thou only art holy, thou only art the Lord ; thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father.* After which we are dismissed with his blessing, according to his promise before mentioned, *in all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.* For he having instituted this sacrament on purpose, in remembrance of himself, saying, *Do this in remembrance of me*, wheresoever this is celebrated, his name must needs be there recorded ; and therefore we cannot doubt but he is always there, ready to bestow his blessing upon all those who there meet together in his name, to receive it : the greatest of all his blessings,

forasmuch as his name is recorded there in the highest manner that can be upon earth. But in all places, where any meet together in his name, his name being there also so far recorded, he comes thither to distribute his blessings among them, such as every one stands in need of. We may be sure of it, for he himself asserts it, saying, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

This, I know, is a truth that is seldom thought of; and therefore I thought good to put you in mind of it, because of the great use that may be made of it, by all that seriously mind their future state, and desire in good earnest to be saved: for such (and I speak only to such) may see by this, where to meet with their Saviour when they please. It is but coming to church, and there meeting together in his name, and you have his word for it, that he will be there in the midst of you. And who would not meet their Saviour, the best friend they have in the world, as often as they can? what need is there of any other arguments to persuade sincere Christians to frequent our public devotions? they who do not, have just cause to suspect their sincerity, and to fear that, whatsoever they pretend, they would joyfully embrace all opportunities they can get of meeting with him to receive his blessing.

But, for that purpose, ye must not come only to see or be seen, nor out of custom only, and by the by, but you must meet together in his name, in obedience to his will, with a desire to serve and worship him there, and with a firm belief of whatsoever he hath said, and particularly this, that he is there in the midst of you; for unless you believe it, it is all one to you whether he be there or no, and therefore you can expect no blessing from him, but rather a curse, for not doing him so much right, as to believe his word.

But do ye indeed believe, as ye ought, that Christ is there in the midst of you? How humbly then, how

modestly, how gravely, how reverently should you carry yourselves before him ! after the same manner as if he should appear visibly among you. Which you cannot choose but do, if you do but remember and consider all the while you are there in whose presence you are, and what you are doing. In repeating the psalms and hymns, you speak to Almighty God your Saviour, acknowledging his infinite goodness and love to you, and therefore must not sit down, but stand in a posture of adoration before him, as the greatest person in the world. In the Collects and Litany, you pray to him, or to the Father in his name, for pardon, and all things necessary for life and godliness ; and therefore must do it only upon our knees. All the while you are there met together in his name, you are serving him, your great Lord and Master, and therefore must do it *with reverence and godly fear*, Heb. xii. 28.

And whatsoever ye there do, as ye must do it in the name of Christ, so ye must trust on him for God's acceptance of it ; and likewise for his granting of what you ask in his name ; according to the promise which he hath here made us : for, in the verse before my text, he saith, *If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.* And then he adds this as the reason of it, *for*, saith he, *where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them* ; because he is there ready to receive and present their petitions to the Father, therefore they shall be granted. So that we have his word and promise for it ; which we ought to trust on. And that we may the better do it in our daily prayers, our church concludes them always with that of St. Chrysostom, still extant in his Liturgy, *Almighty God, who hast given us grace, at this time, to make our common supplications unto thee, and dost promise, that when two or three are gathered together in thy name, thou wilt grant their*

requests. It is here that he makes this promise, which we must constantly believe, as ever we desire it should be fulfilled to us.

Lastly, when ye have met in the name of Christ, and so with Christ himself, ye must be sure, afterwards, to live accordingly. The Jews observing the carriage of the apostles, *took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus*, Acts iv. 13. so whatsoever place or company you are in, ye should carry yourselves so, that they may take notice that ye have been with Jesus, that ye have not gone to church in vain, but have indeed met your Saviour there, and have received so much grace and virtue from him, that ye are grown better than ye were, and better than other people are : and that by your often meeting with Christ on earth, ye are fitted to live with him for ever in heaven.

S E R M O N CXXII.

THE WAY OF SEEKING GOD, SO AS TO FIND HIM.

ISAIAH lv. 6.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

ALTHOUGH there be many among us who have much, there are none but want something, something which they think would make them happy, or, at least, happier than they are, if they had it. Hence it is, that people generally are so very busy in the world, some seeking for one thing, some for another, according to their several inclinations and conditions : but whatsoever it is that men seek for here below, when they have found it, they are but where they were ; no more satisfied than they were before, but rather less : for the things of this world are so far from lessening our desires, when we have them, that they rather heighten and increase them. The more we have, the more we crave ; the more we find, the more we seek : so that if men's hearts be once set upon such things, there is no end of seeking ; as many have found by woful experience, who have spent their whole lives in seeking, and seeking of them, without ever finding any rest or quiet in their minds.

And that which is worst of all is, that men are, notwithstanding, so earnest in seeking after other things,

that they seldom or never think of him, who can satiate their souls, and make them happy ; and therefore ought not only to be sought before and above all things else, but all other things ought to be sought for, only in order to our finding him. Which, that I might be so happy as to convince you of, and likewise direct you how to seek, so as to find this the chiefest, the only good in the world, I have chosen these words to explain unto you, where you have first a command, *seek ye the Lord*; and then the time or season wherein to do it, *while he may be found*.

The command is general, imposed not only upon the Jews, as some have thought, nor upon the Gentiles only, as others, but upon all mankind. And though nothing be more frequently mentioned in God's holy word, yet, I fear, there are but few who understand how to do it. I am sure there are but few that do it as they ought. And therefore nothing can be more necessary, than to shew what it is properly to seek the Lord, and how ye may do it, so as not to seek in vain, but may certainly find him, and, in him, all the joy and happiness that ye can desire.

When we are therefore commanded to *seek the Lord*, it is not to be so understood, as if he was at any distance from us, or in some secret place, where it would be difficult to find him. This the apostle forewarns us of, where he saith, that God *hath made of one blood all nations, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him*; and then adds, *though he be not far from every one of us : for in him we live, and move, and have our being*, Acts xvii. 27, 28. for seeing we have our very being in him, we cannot be where he is not, and therefore need not go from ourselves to find him ; he being always present with us, and we in him, wheresoever we are.

But by seeking the Lord, we are to understand, our seeking his love and favour ; that he may be in a pe-

culiar manner our God, to bless us and keep us in all our ways, which is therefore elsewhere expressed by their seeking the face of the Lord ; as, *seek ye the Lord, and his strength, seek his face for evermore*, Psal. cv. 4. and he himself saith, *I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face ; in their affliction they will seek me early*, Hos. v. 15. where seeking him, and seeking his face, is plainly the same thing. And the seeking his face, is the same also with seeking his favour As where the Wise-man saith, *many seek the ruler's favour*, Prov. xxix. 26. in the original it is, *many seek the ruler's face*. So we are said to seek the face of God, the supreme Ruler of the world, when we seek to find favour in his sight : that he may cause his face to shine upon us, and be gracious and merciful unto us. This is to seek the Lord to good purpose : happy are they who can so find him : *blessed are the people who are in such a case* : blessed are they who thus *have the Lord for their God*.

But to what purpose is it for us sinful creatures thus to seek the Lord ? for how can we, who have so highly offended him, expect to find any favour or mercy at his hands ? The unfolding of this mystery, will make way for our right understanding what is properly to seek the Lord, and how we may do it effectually. And therefore I shall search into the bottom of it, and lay it as open as I can, that all who do not wilfully shut their eyes, may see into it.

For which purpose therefore, we must first call to mind how that God having made man in his own image and likeness, so long as he continued such as he was made, he that made him could not but be well-pleased and delighted in him, not only in that he was the workmanship of his own hands, but likewise in that he was like unto himself, so far as a creature could be, in *righteousness and true holiness*. So that if we had kept our first estate, we should never have had any occasion to seek God, for we should always have had him, and

enjoyed him to the full, as far as finite creatures could be capable of his infinite goodness and favour.

But the first man Adam, in whom all others were contained, by transgressing the commandment, defaced the image of God that was enstamped upon him, and so made himself and his whole posterity unlike to God, of a nature quite different and contrary to his. For his is most pure and holy, whereas all mankind is now become sinful and unclean : *there is none that doth good, no not one* ; but all are naturally inclined to transgress the laws of God, and do it continually. Hence it is, that he is so highly offended and displeased with all mankind, not only for their not answering his end in making them, but likewise for that both they themselves and all their actions are so disagreeable to his holy will and nature. And therefore, as the apostle observes, *we are all by nature the children of wrath*, Eph. ii. 3. that is, so long as we continue in our natural state, such as we came into the world, as propagated from the first Adam, we are under the displeasure and wrath of God, and liable to the dismal effects and consequents of it, even to all sorts of punishments which it is possible for creatures to bear, and which were at first threatened under the name of death.

This is the true state of nature, which all mankind are in : but seeing they fell into it at first only in their common head or stock, the first Adam, Almighty God, to shew forth his mercy and truth, which otherwise would not have appeared in the world, was graciously pleased to find out a way for their recovery out of it, if they will but make use of it. Such a way, that the angels themselves cannot but desire to look into, and admire ; though men, who are most concerned, are apt to take little notice of it, or at least not so much as it is their own interest to do. And, in short, it was this : that eternal and most glorious Being, here called *Jehovah, the Lord*, having from all eternity begotten a Son of one essence or substance with himself, as he ex-

erted his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, creating all things by him, so he manifested also his infinite grace and truth, in redeeming fallen man by him ; who for that purpose, by the power of his holy Spirit overshadowing a virgin, took upon him the whole nature of man, uniting it to himself in so wonderful a manner, that he became truly man, as well as God, in one and the same person : man in general having the whole nature of man in him, as the first man Adam had ; with this mighty difference, that the first man was only man, this God as well as man, and so fully qualified to restore mankind to the same state from which they fell in the first. And therefore was called *Jesus the Saviour*, as being the only Saviour of mankind, and *able to save to the utmost all that come to God by him*, as all were destroyed by falling from God in the first man.

For the eternal Son of God being thus become man in general, another Adam, as he is called, he lived some time upon earth, fulfilling all righteousness, and performing most perfect obedience to the will and law of God, which the first and all other men had transgressed : neither was the righteousness which he performed in our nature only perfect, and therefore as much, but much more than was required of mankind, in that it was the righteousness not of man only, but likewise of God himself. Which he demonstrated by doing many such good works as exceeded the power of man, and therefore could not have been done by him, but as he was God : and so were all his works, the works of God as well as man : and so was his doctrine also, whereby he taught men what they should believe and do, that they may be saved by him. Every thing he said was an oracle, uttered by God himself.

Neither was he obedient only through the whole course of his life, but to death itself, even the death of the cross. Upon which he, the last Adam, suffered that death which had been threatened to the first. And he having suffered it in our whole nature, it was not

only equivalent to the death of all men, but it was of infinitely greater worth and value; in that it was the death of a divine person, one who was God as well as man. So that by it, he did not only make full satisfaction for the sins of mankind, and so appeased the wrath which God had justly conceived against them; but he merited also his favour, and all sorts of blessings for them, even all things necessary to make them holy and happy for ever; which therefore are all promised in him, and for his sake, in God's holy word. And when he had thus, by the sacrifice of his death, made propitiation for the sins of the whole world, he soon after rose from the dead, and went up to heaven, where he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God the Father, hath absolute dominion over all the creatures in heaven and earth, and ever liveth to make intercession for those who come unto God by him.

Now from hence we may see what sure ground we have to expect the favour of God, if we seek it aright: for though we have lost it, his only-begotten Son hath redeemed it for us; and is always ready to restore us to it, if we do but apply ourselves unto him for it. It is true, we never did, nor can see him upon earth; if we could, he could not do so much for us as he can now that he is in heaven, there appearing in the presence of God for us; making atonement and reconciliation for our sins, by virtue of the sacrifice which he once offered upon earth for them. What therefore if we have sinned? we have all sinned, but Jesus Christ hath suffered for our sins? What if we have incensed the wrath of God against us? his only Son hath delivered us from it. What if we have deserved death? the Lord of life died in our stead. What if we can merit nothing at the hands of God? he himself hath merited all things for us. What if we have defaced the image of God, in which we were made? he that is the express image of his person can enstamp it again upon us. What if we have no righteousness that can bear the test of God in

themselves ? in him we have the righteousness of God himself. What if we can do nothing of ourselves ? we can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth us. What if we have got a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of satan to buffet us ? his grace is sufficient for us, his strength is made perfect in weakness. What if we live in the midst of temptations and dangers ? he is always with us, ready either to prevent our falling, or else to raise us up again, which he sees best for us ? What if we be in such straits, that we know not which way to turn us ? his holy Spirit is a voice behind us, saying, *This is the way, walk in it.* What if the devil should desire to have us, that he may sift us as wheat ? our Mediator will pray that our faith may not fail, and then the gates of hell can never prevail against us. What if our good works come short of what the law requires, and therefore in themselves are offensive unto God ? yet being done in his name, they are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, the Lord our righteousness. What if, after all our care and diligence to avoid it, we sometimes fall into sin, and so displease God ? *We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ; and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.* He not only was, when he died for them, but by virtue of that death he now and always is the propitiation for our sins, reconciling us unto God, and keeping us in his love and favour

Seeing therefore we have such an High-priest in heaven, making atonement for our sins, such a Mediator between God and us, such an Advocate with the Father, such a glorious, almighty, all-sufficient Saviour, that is *able to save to the utmost* those who *come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us*, we may well go to God by him, and seek his favour. By him, I say, and not only I, but the apostle himself, Heb. vii. 25. For there is no way for us, sinful creatures upon earth, to go up to the most high and holy King of heaven, but by the Mediator which he hath

appointed between us : who therefore saith, *I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*, John xiv. 6. but by him we may all go unto the Father, seek his face, and find grace and favour in his sight ; for *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*, John i. 17. It was he that purchased the grace or favour of God for us : it is in him that God hath promised it to us, and manifesteth his truth in doing what he hath so promised ; and therefore, by him we may all find it, if we seek as we ought by him.

And herein lies the great art of seeking the Lord, so as to find him gracious and merciful unto us : we must seek him in the name and through the mediation of his only-begotten Son, our only Saviour Jesus Christ, believing and trusting on him (who alone can do it) to make our peace with God, and reconcile him to us, that he may be our God, and we his people, according to the covenant that he hath made and confirmed to us in him. This is the way which God himself directs us to, wherein to seek him, by his prophet, in this very place ; for he here first calls upon all that thirst to come unto him ; and for their encouragement tells them, that he will *make an everlasting covenant with them, even the sure mercies of David*, ver. 1, 2, 3. the mercies which he had promised, and so made sure in Christ, the Son of David, whom he had given as a *witness, a leader, and a commander of his people*, ver. 4. as a witness to testify his mercy and truth to them, as a leader to bring them to him, and as a commander to rule and govern them. And then, having asserted the largeness of his dominion, he adds, *seek ye the Lord while he may be found*. Seek him in the way described, by him in whom the covenant of grace is established, and who alone can lead you to him ; and therefore by whom alone you can ever find him.

But as we can never seek the Lord, so as to find him any other way than by Christ, so we can never do it by him, without believing in him. Upon which the Gospel therefore lays the whole stress of our salvation, and

of all things relating to it ; which are all, in effect, comprehended in our seeking the Lord ; for if we seek him, so as to find him, all things else follow in course. And therefore all that would do it effectually, must live with a constant and firm belief in Christ our Saviour, depending wholly upon him to make reconciliation and intercession for them, that Almighty God, for his sake, will be graciously pleased to pardon all their sins, to renew and sanctify them by his holy Spirit, to receive them again into his favour, and into the number of his own children, that they may live, for the future, always under his particular care and conduct. They who thus seek the Lord, can never fail of finding him.

But, in order to our thus seeking the Lord, there are several things required as preliminaries to prepare and dispose us for it : whereof the first is, that our hearts be possessed with such a belief and sense of God's glory and goodness, that we really prefer him in our judgments, and desire him with our whole hearts, before all things else ; so as to be able truly to say with David, *Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee*, Psal. lxxiii. 25. for they who seek the Lord, must seek him as he is the Lord, Jehovah, the greatest good in the world ; and therefore must seek him with all their hearts, or above all things in the world besides, otherwise they cannot expect to find him, for they do not seek him as he is : *If thou seek the Lord thy God*, saith Moses, *thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul*, Deut. iv. 29. and he himself says, *ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart*, Jer xxix. 13. but none can seek the Lord with all their hearts, that do not so desire him. And none can desire the Lord with all their hearts, but they will seek him so in course ; *With my soul*, saith the prophet to God, *have I desired thee in the night : yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early*, Isa. xxvi. 9.

But no man can desire the Lord with all his heart, whose heart is still set upon sin or wickedness; for that being directly contrary unto him, it is impossible they should both be heartily desired at the same time. And therefore, in order to your desiring and seeking the Lord so as to find him, ye must take that course which the prophet here prescribes for it; who, when he had said, *seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near*, adds immediately, *let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*, ver 7 whereby we are given to understand, that they who do not forsake their sins, and turn unto the Lord, shall find no mercy at his hands, but they shall find it abundantly that do.

When your hearts are thus taken off from sin, and your desires wholly carried after the Lord, then ye must seek him by prayer, according to the prophet's direction in my text, *seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near*. Intimating, that we must seek him, by calling upon him, or praying to him. To the same purpose is that in the prophet Zechariah, *many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord*, Zech. viii. 22. for though many may seem to pray unto the Lord, and yet not seek him, none can really seek him without praying to him, nor with it neither, unless they pray aright, that is, in the name of the Lord Jesus, our Mediator and Advocate with him. For as we can never find any favour in the sight of God without him, so we have no ground to expect it by him, unless we ask it in his name; but if we ask it in his name, we shall certainly have it; for we have his own word for it, saying, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*, John xvi. 23. whatsoever we may think upon earth, the name of Jesus is very powerful in hea-

ven; so powerful that nothing is ever denied that is good for us, if we heartily use his name in praying for it; no, not the greatest thing that we can ever desire and seek, even the Lord God Almighty himself, or his love and favour.

But then we must take care to use his name aright, even so as to believe, at the same time, that he will make his word good, and intercede so effectually for us, that we shall certainly have what we desire in it. This caution he himself hath also given us, when he saith, *Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them*, Mark xi. 24. and therefore commands us, by his apostles, to pray in *faith, nothing wavering*, James i. 6. and *without wrath and doubting*, 1 Tim. ii. 8. for if we will not do him so much right as to take his word, and believe that he will do as he hath said and promised, in the place above mentioned, we deprive ourselves of the benefit of his intercession; for he intercedes for none but those who actually believe and trust in him. And unless he mediate or intercede for us, we may pray our hearts out, all will signify nothing, God will neither grant what we desire, nor accept of any thing we do. Whereas if we diligently seek the Lord God Almighty, by prayer and supplication, in the name of his Son Jesus, and keep our faith all the while fixed upon him as our Advocate, and upon the promises which are made us in him, we shall not fail of finding him, in the sincere and constant use of the means which he hath appointed for that purpose.

I say, in the use of the means which he hath appointed for that purpose; for we must not expect that he should work miracles for us, or act immediately from himself, without our using such means as he hath ordained for such an end; for he would not have ordained them, if he had not designed to act by them. Now those which we call the means of grace, because it is in them that God usually manifesteth his grace and favour

to us, are the public praying to, and praising his great name, the solemn hearing his holy word read or expounded to us, and celebrating the sacrament of our Lord's supper, in memory of his death, by virtue of which he intercedes in heaven for us : and all this in places dedicated to the name and service of Almighty God, where he himself promised, in the Old Testament, to meet his people ; *In all places, saith he, where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee*, Exod. xx. 24. and in the New, our Lord himself saith, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*, Matt. xviii. 20. and if he be there, as he most certainly is, where-soever any number of his faithful people are met together in his name, they may as certainly find him there, ready to perfume their spiritual sacrifices with the incense of his merits, that God may smell a sweet savour from them, and manifest his special love and favour to such as heartily and sincerely offer them up unto him.

I add, heartily and sincerely, because without that they are not spiritual sacrifices, but dead and useless performances, neither acceptable to God, nor any way profitable to those who perform them. We go thither to meet the Lord, the greatest person in the world, and to seek his favour, and therefore must prepare our hearts, and put them into the best posture that we can, that we may not only carry ourselves before him, and serve him with all outward expressions of humility and reverence due to his divine majesty, but may likewise keep our minds all the while intent upon him, and upon the service we are performing to him ; that the petitions we put up unto him, in the name of his Son there present, may come from the bottom of our hearts ; and our whole souls may be lifted up in praising his holy name ; that we may receive his word with all readiness of mind, and sincere resolutions to believe and live according to it ; and feed upon our Lord's most blessed body and blood, with such a quick and lively faith, that he may

ever after dwell in us and we in him. If we could thus heartily and sincerely use the means which he hath appointed for our obtaining his grace and favour, we could not miss of it.

But that we may use them thus, we must use them constantly; it is no easy matter to bring our hearts into such a frame as this; and it can never be done without long and constant exercise. Use makes perfectness in this as well as in other things; they who do not use all these means, can use none of them to any purpose; and they who seldom use them, can never use them as they ought. What will it avail you to come to church, to seek the Lord a little now and then, upon some extraordinary occasion, or when ye have nothing else to do? Is this to seek the Lord, so as to find him? no, deceive not yourselves, this is no seeking him at all; for that none can be truly said to do, that do not seek him before all things in the world besides: whereas it is plain, that you seek other things not only besides him, but before him too. And then it is no wonder that ye never find him gracious and merciful to you, but rather angry and displeased with you, for preferring other things before him, and for not seeking him while he may be found.

While he may be found. That is the next thing to be considered in these words, wherein ye are commanded to seek the Lord, while he may be found; and so are put in mind, that there is a time when he may be found, and a time when he will not. That there is a time when he may be found, we cannot doubt, seeing he hath commanded us to seek him. For he said *not to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain*, Isa. xlv. 19. but that there is a time also when he will not be found, is too plain to be denied, for he himself hath said it; he said to his people Israel, *they shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him, he hath withdrawn himself from them*, Hos. v. 6. and therefore he ordered one of the prophet's children

to be called *Loruhamah*, that is, one that should not find mercy; and gave this as the reason, *for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel, but I will utterly cast them away*, Hos. i. 6. And another he called *Lo-ammi*, that is, not my people, *for*, saith he, *ye are not my people, and I will not be your God*, ver. 9. Though he had been their God for so long a time, yet the time would come, when they should not find him any longer so. And when the time drew near that this prophecy was to be accomplished, our Lord, coming near Jerusalem, and beholding it, wept over it, saying, *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace: but now they are hid from thine eyes*, Luke xix. 42. the time was when she might have seen them if she would; but she would not then. And now that time is gone, such things are hid from her eyes; so that although she seek them, she shall not find them. And therefore he tells the inhabitants of that city and country, that *the kingdom of God shall be taken from them, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*, Matt. xxi. 43. whereby he also intimated the reason of this severe threatening, even because they had not lived according to the means of grace, which they had so long enjoyed; therefore they should enjoy them no longer, but other people should now have them, which would make better use of them than they had done.

How punctually this was fulfilled upon the Jews, we all know; they were once the people of God, and found him to be their God, whensoever they duly sought him: but now he hath cast them off, for their obstinacy and unbelief, for above these 1600 years. And though they have been seeking him all this while, they could never find him.

Neither is this the case of the Jews only, but of many nations also which have professed the Christian religion: Judea itself, upon which the Sun of righteousness first arose, is now returned to darkness; the seven

churches of Asia are now but so many dens of thieves and robbers ; all Asia Minor, and Syria, and Egypt, together with Greece, Macedonia, and other parts of Europe, where the apostles first propagated Christianity, are now over-run with Mahometanism. That part of Africa, which we call Barbary, that was once so famous for learning and piety, is now as infamous for ignorance and barbarity ; there is scarce a Christian to be found among them, at least that is a native of the country. And it is much to be observed, that Christianity flourished among them so long as they continued in the unity of the church, but vanished soon after they fell into schisms and factions. A sad omen for us.

And to come nearer home : it is now near 203 years since the Reformation began in Germany ; and so long as they who professed it lived up to what they professed, it spread and increased wonderfully : but now we see how it is persecuted, and in effect suppressed, not only in a neighbour kingdom, but in several parts of the empire. And among ourselves : it is now above 140 years since our church was reformed ; and reformed in doctrine, discipline, and worship, according to the pattern of the primitive and apostolic church, as near as a national church could well be. And so long as both clergy and people continued stedfastly to believe her doctrine, submit to her discipline, and worship God with one heart and mind, according to her directions ; as they sought him constantly, he was as constantly found of them, and defended both them and his church established among them against their enemies on every side.

But how is the case now altered with us ? how basely have we left our first love ? how far are we fallen from the zeal and piety of our first reformers, and their immediate successors ? which part of our Reformation is now observed, as it once was, and always ought to be ? which of the articles of our holy religion have not been questioned by some, and denied by others, and openly

contradicted? what sort of tares did the enemy ever sow in our Lord's field, that have not sprung up again among us? how many false teachers are now to be found among us, who, according to St. Peter's prediction, *privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves* (and others too) *swift destruction*, 2 Pet. ii. 1. how little respect is now shewn to the ministry, or to the discipline that Christ hath settled in his church? or rather, how is it generally slighted and despised, as if it was an useless insignificant thing? how many are there, who live as without God in the world, performing no sort of worship to him? how few that worship him, according to the orders of our church, with reverence and godly fear? how many are there among us that were never baptized, and so are mere heathens? how many of those who are baptized, never receive the sacrament of our Lord's supper all their lives long? how few that receive it above once or twice a year, even in such places also where it is celebrated every Lord's day? what wonder is it then, that schism and divisions, ignorance, profaneness, immorality, and all sorts of lewdness and debauchery, have overspread the face of the whole kingdom? how can it be otherwise, when the means which God hath appointed to make them better, are so generally neglected by people of all ranks and qualities in it?

But is this the way to enjoy the benefit of our Reformation any longer? or rather, is it not the ready way to lose it? God grant that may not be the consequence, the sad consequence of our making so little use of it. I am sure we have too much cause to fear it; for the Spirit of God will not always strive with men.

No nation under heaven hath had the means of seeking the Lord, and his grace, more duly and powerfully administered, than this for a long time hath had, and of his infinite goodness as yet hath; but if we, notwithstanding, still refuse to seek him by them, but disregard and

abuse them, so as to be no way the better, but rather the worse for them, what can we expect, but that he should take them from us, and give them to a nation that will bring forth the fruits thereof? which God knows we have not, and therefore may justly deprive us of them, and punish us too for the contempt that we have thrown upon them. Let us hear what he himself saith, *Because I called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me,* Prov. i. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.

Wherefore, brethren, it is now time, high time, to look about you, and to seek the Lord while he may be found; you do not know how soon he may hide his face, and then it will be in vain to seek him. And therefore be advised to do it now; for he saith, *I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation,* 2 Cor. vi. 2. *To-day, therefore, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,* but set yourselves in good earnest to seek the Lord, *before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord come unto you. Seek ye the Lord all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgments; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger,* as the prophet speaks, Zeph. ii. 2, 3.

Seek ye the Lord, therefore, while ye may; seek him with all your hearts, above all things in the world besides; for if ye seek him, ye seek all the good things

ye can desire, and shall have them too : *the young lions do lack and suffer hunger : but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing*, Psal. xxxiv. 10.
2 Chron. xiv. 7

If ye seek him, ye seek his mercy to pardon all your sins, his wisdom to direct you in all your ways, his power to defend you from all your enemies, his holy Spirit to support you in all conditions : ye seek righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost : ye seek the truest riches, the highest honours, the greatest pleasures that men or angels can ever have : these are glorious things indeed for a man to seek. Who would not seek them if he might ? and who may not find them if he will ? blessed be God, he may yet be found, if we do but seek him as we ought.

Let us therefore, by his assistance, now resolve to do so. Let others, if they please, seek the little things upon earth ; let us seek the Lord, the greatest, the only good in all the world. Let us seek him this and all the rest of our days. This is not a work to be done only now and then, but through the whole course of our lives. It is said of Uzziah, king of Judah, as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper, 2 Kings xxvi. 5. and as long as we heartily seek him, we shall as certainly find him. We shall find God the Father, our health, and strength, and tower ; our sun and shield, and our exceeding great reward. We shall find God the Son, our wisdom and righteousness, our sanctification and redemption. We shall find God the Holy Ghost, our light, and life, and joy ; our guide and direction what to do, and our assistance in the doing of it. We shall find this one almighty Being, the Lord of heaven and earth, our constant friend, our Father and our God ; we shall find that he will make his abode with us, cause his face to shine upon us, and so manifest his special love and favour to us : that he will put away from us all hurtful things, and give us all those things which are profitable for us : that he will preserve us

from all evil, and make all things work together for our good : that he will bless and sanctify all occurrences to us, so that whatsoever happens we shall be some way or other the better for it : that he will supply us with all things necessary for the life, and godliness : that he will hide us under the shadow of his wings, that the destroying angel may not come near to touch us : that he will keep us by his almighty power, through faith, unto salvation. In short, upon our seeking the Lord heartily upon all occasions, while we are upon earth, we shall find that he will carry us through all the changes and chances of this mortal life, so as to bring us at last to himself in heaven, where we shall seek him no more, but enjoy him for ever : and all through the merits and intercession of his only Son, our only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ : *to whom, &c.*

S E R M O N CXXIII.

THE WAY OF PLEASING GOD.

1 Thess. iv. 1.

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

ALTHOUGH we may differ, perhaps, about some things, there is one thing, I dare say, we all agree in ; we all agree in this, that the world did not make itself, but that it was made by Almighty God, who is therefore called *Jehovah*, essence or being itself, because as he existeth in and of himself, so he gives essence and existence to all things else. All things else subsisting so continually in him, that as nothing could be made, so nothing can continue in its being one moment without him. And seeing we all agree in this, we cannot but likewise all acknowledge, that this almighty Being, who made and upholds the world, doth likewise govern and dispose of all and every thing that is in it ; for seeing all things depend continually upon him, all things must needs be continually subject to his divine will and pleasure ; who is therefore said to do *whatsoever he pleaseth*, Psal. cxv. 3. and that too, *in heaven, in the earth, in the sea, and in all the deep places*, Psal. cxxxv. 6. that is, in the whole world. The whole world is his, he doth what he will with it, and with every thing that is

in it. He hath all the angels in heaven at his beck, and all the devils in hell at his foot: he gives bounds to the sea; he balanceth the clouds; he governs the winds; he weighs the mountains, and numbereth the very hairs of every man's head; he exalteth one man, and he depresseth another; he makes rich, and he makes poor; he preserveth health, and he bringeth sickness; he gives life, and he takes it away when he pleaseth. So that we and all things in the world are entirely under his command, and at his disposal; he may do with us what he will; for it is in him that *we live, and move, and have our being.*

And if so, how happy must they needs be, who are in the favour of this supreme and all-glorious Governor of the world, so as to have him well-pleased with them, and with what they do? this is so great a happiness, that none can apprehend it but they who have it: but they know, they feel it to be not only the greatest, but the only true felicity their nature is capable of. And yet, blessed be God for it, we all, as yet, are capable of it, and may most certainly attain it too, if we do but take the right course in order to it; for St. Paul here puts the Thessalonians in mind, that they had received of him how they might so walk as to please God. Which plainly shews, that it is not only possible for us little mortals upon earth to please the great God of heaven, but that St. Paul knew it himself, and had taught the Thessalonians how to do it. And therefore we need not despair, but that having so many of his writings, and others too of the same divine stamp, we also may from thence learn the true art and method of pleasing God.

An art of such mighty use, so necessary for all Christians to learn and practise, that we never find the apostle pressing any thing more earnestly upon them, than he doth this; he calls them brethren, to shew, that what he now said to them, proceeded merely from his brotherly love and kindness to them: he prays, he be-

seecheth, he exhorteth them, not in his own name neither, but in the name of Jesus Christ ; in his name that loved them so, as to give himself for them ; in his name, who was so great a friend to them, as to lay down his own life to redeem theirs ; in his name who is their only Mediator and Advocate in heaven. In his name he beseecheth and exhorteth them, that as they had received of him how they ought to walk, that is, how they ought to order the whole course of their lives, so as to please God, so they would abound in it ; that they would not only do it, but do it every day more and more ; *furthermore*, saith he, *we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus Christ, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.*

The apostle, before the writing of this Epistle to them, had been among the Thessalonians, and had preached the Gospel to them ; and they had received the word he preached, *not as the word of men, but (as it is indeed) the word of God, which effectually worketh in them who believe*, chap. ii. 13. and, in my text, he reminds them of one of the principal things which they had so received of him, even *how they ought to walk, and to please God*. And not doubting but they had already set upon the practice of what he had then taught them, he now adds moreover, that he would have them to abound in it, to do it more sincerely, more exactly, more constantly every day than other

If those divine discourses which the apostle then made to them had been now extant, we need have gone no further, to be fully instructed in the great art of pleasing God. But the Holy Ghost did not see it necessary to leave them upon record, having given us sufficient directions about it in the Scriptures, which were written by his inspiration, and have been preserved by his infinite power and goodness to this day. Out of which, therefore, I shall endeavour, by his assistance, to give you what light I can into it, that you may all

know how you ought to walk so as to please God : for which purpose we shall consider,

I. What it is properly to please God.

II. What we must do, that we may please God.

III. How it comes to pass, that any thing we do pleases God.

IV. How happy they are who walk so as to please God.

As to the first, when we speak of pleasing God, we must not think that he is moved or affected in himself by any thing that we do, as we are apt to be ; for he being a most pure, simple, uncompounded, infinite, immutable, eternal act, cannot be subject to any passion ; but whatsoever is, or is not done in the world, it is all one to him, he is still the same, without variableness or shadow of change. In which sense we may truly say with him in Job, *Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous ? or is it any profit to him that thou makest thy way perfect*, Job xxii. 3. no surely, he being infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself and his own perfections, cannot possibly receive any accessions of pleasure or profit by any thing which the creatures do, who can do nothing but what he himself enableth them to do. But howsoever, in the revelations that he hath made of himself, and of his divine will to mankind, he is pleased so far to condescend to our shallow and weak capacities, as to represent himself and his actions towards us, under the name and notion of such passions or affections as we ourselves are subject to, that so we may the better understand them. Thus when we do amiss, he represents himself as angry with us ; not that he is moved to any such passion in himself ; but because his actions then are such, in a higher degree, as ours use to be towards those that we are angry with. And when we do well, he represents himself as pleased with us, because he then manifesteth and carrieth himself to us, as we do to those with whom we are pleased : and so we are properly said to please

God, when we do such things for which he is pleased to signify his good will, his favour and pleasure towards us.

What these things are, is the next thing to be considered : and it deserves our most serious consideration ; for we all, I dare say, desire to please God ; and therefore cannot but be solicitous to know how to do it : neither is it any difficult matter to find it out ; for if we do but consult our own breasts, we cannot but find and feel within ourselves, that whenever any thing goes cross to our wills, it disturbs and offends us, raising in our minds that passion which we call anger or displeasure. And, on the other side, when any thing is done according to our wills, or falls out as we would have it, then our minds are at rest and quiet, and we find in ourselves a secret kind of delight and pleasure in it, and in the person that doth it. So here, Almighty God, in his holy word, hath revealed his divine will to us, what he would have us do, and what he would have us not do. Now when we do that which he would not, or do not that which he would have done, we act contrary to his will, and so offend and provoke him to anger. But when we leave that undone which he would not have done, or do that which he would have us do, then we act according to his own will, and therefore please him ; especially if we therefore do it that we may please him, or in pure obedience to his revealed will. Hence Samuel saith, *that to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of lambs*, 1 Sam. xv. 22. that is, sincere obedience to the will of God is more pleasing and acceptable to him, than all the sacrifices of the Mosaic law, because, though they also were commanded by him, yet they were not commanded for themselves, but to make up the defects of men's obedience to the moral law another way. Whereas to do that which he would have us, merely because he would have us do it, is, in itself, an actual and sincere

fulfilling of his will, and therefore cannot but be very grateful and pleasing to him.

Hence therefore, whatsoever it is that God hath commanded us to do, and so hath signified his will and pleasure that we should do it, by doing of that we certainly please him. Thus it was that our blessed Saviour pleased God, through the whole course of his life, because the whole course of it was but one continued act of obedience to the divine will ; *The Father*, saith he, *hath not left me alone ; for I do always those things that please him*, John viii. 29. and the reason was, because *he did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth : he went about doing good ; he did the will of him who sent him, and finished the work which God had given him to do*, John iv. 34. xvii. 4. and his whole life being so exactly agreeable to the will of God, he could not but always please him : insomuch, that both at his baptism and transfiguration, God publicly declared himself well pleased with him, by a voice from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*, Matt. ii. 17 xvii. 5.

And as our Saviour did, so may we always please God, if we always do his will ; doing his will and pleasing him being, in effect, but one and the same thing ; and therefore where it is testified of Enoch, that he *walked with God*, Gen. v. 22, 24. the Seventy render it, *Καὶ εὐηρέτησε τῷ Θεῷ*, *he pleased God* ; and that this is the true meaning of the phrase, is confirmed by the Holy Ghost himself, saying of Enoch, that *before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God*, Heb. xi. 5. from whence it is evident, that walking with God is the same with pleasing of him ; and that he therefore pleased him because he walked with him. That is, the whole course of his life was such as God would have it, running parallel all along with his will ; so that he walked, as it were, in the same path with God himself, being holy, according to his capacity, as

God is holy, in all manner of conversation ; and so far as we thus walk with God as he did, so far we may be confident that God is pleased with us, as he was with him. And therefore, to understand how to please God, we need do no more than consult his holy word, and consider what he hath there commanded or forbidden us to do. And if we avoid what he hath forbidden, and do what he hath commanded, we may have the same testimony from God, as Enoch had, that we please him : for, by this means, we shall *walk worthy of the Lord, to all well-pleasing*, as the apostle speaks, Col. i. 10. *and continue in God's love*, John xv. 10.

But hoping that you all desire in good earnest to please God, and for that purpose to understand more distinctly how to do it, I shall instance, more especially, in such things as Almighty God hath, in a particular manner, signified his pleasure and delight in, the more to excite and encourage us to exercise ourselves continually in them. And they are such as respect either himself, or our neighbours.

First, in respect of himself ; he is much pleased with our fearing and trusting on him. I join them together, because he himself doth so, saying, *the Lord's delight is in them that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy*, Psal. cxlvii. 11. whereby we are given to understand, that they who sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and make him their fear and their dread, so as to fear no thing or person in the world but him, but fear him so as to make it their constant care never to break his laws, dishonour his name, or offend his divine Majesty, upon any account, although they were sure to gain never so much by it, they so far please God, that he takes delight in them. And so he doth too in those who trust in his mercy ; that is, who in the various changes and chances of this mortal life, keep their hearts always fixed, trusting in the Lord, and in him only, to prevent the evils they fear, and remove those they feel ; to keep them from temptation, or enable them to over-

come it ; to supply them with all things necessary both for life and godliness ; to order every thing that happens, so as to make it turn to their advantage ; and so support themselves in all conditions, with a sure trust and confidence on his infinite goodness and mercy to them. They who do thus, may be sure that they are highly in God's favour, he being so pleased with them for it, that he takes them into his own protection, and never fails to give them what they hope for aright from him, if it be really good for them ; and if it be not, he gives them something that is so instead of it. Indeed, there is nothing that I know of whereby we can honour, and, by consequence, please God more, than by living with a constant dependence upon him to direct, assist, and bless us in what we do, and to give us all things we can desire, to make us holy and happy for ever ; so that we may truly say with the Psalmist, *blessed are all they who put their trust in him*, Psal. ii. ult.

The same may be said of our loving God, as our chiefest good, desiring and seeking his favour before all things else, submitting our wills entirely to his, and resting fully satisfied in our minds with every thing that he doth : for such holy and divine acts of the soul as these are can proceed from none, but from God himself, and therefore cannot but be very pleasing to him, as every thing is that he himself doth. But in all his holy word he hath no ways expressed himself more pleased with any thing, than with the repentance and conversion of a sinner : for this we have not only his word, but his oath too. *As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways and live*, Ezek. xxxiii. 11. when the wicked man, who was born, and hath lived all along in sin, when this man turns from his former course of life, leaves off his sins, and becomes a new man, observing all the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways that lead to everlasting life, this is the man that God takes pleasure in, more than

in the death of the wicked ; yea, in some sense, more than in the life of the righteous ; as our Saviour intimates in the parable of the lost sheep, where he assures us, that there is *joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance*, Luke xv. 7 and especially in that of the prodigal son, who coming to himself, and therefore returning to his father, with what joy and pleasure doth his father receive him ? when he saw him a great way off, he had *compassion on him*, he ran, he fell on his neck, and kissed him. He called for the best robe, and put it on him ; he put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet : he said to his servants, *Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry*. And when his other son, who had served him faithfully all along, seemed to be troubled at it, he mildly rebuked him, saying, *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found*, Luke xv. 31, 32. which is certainly the most lively representation that could be made of the great joy that Almighty God is pleased to take in the conversion of a sinner ; and should make all sinners, such as we all are, resolve, without any more ado, to return from their sins to God, that so they may be in the number of those blessed souls, with which the supreme Governor of the whole world is so much pleased.

But though the first conversion of sinners, and their admission into the catalogue of saints, be thus in a peculiar manner pleasing unto God, yet he is pleased likewise with all the faithful services which they afterwards perform to him ; especially with their solemn and devout addresses to him : *for the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight*, Prov. xv. 8. whereby is signified to us, that God himself delights both in the private and public devotions of his people : and, by consequence, if

we would continue in his favour, and have him always pleased with us, as we must often retire into our closets, and there pray to our Father in secret, so we must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but take all the opportunities that we can get of presenting ourselves together before him, to beg his mercy in the pardon of our sins, to implore his aid and assistance against temptations, and to supplicate his divine goodness, and give us that measure of his grace and holy Spirit, whereby we may be able to serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind ; and to supply us with all things else, which he knows to be needful for us.

But above all, when we meet together, we must never forget to praise and magnify his most holy name, this being one of the most acceptable services we can ever perform to him ; far beyond all the sacrifices of the law ; *I will praise the name of God*, saith David, *with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving ; this also shall please the Lord, better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs*, Psal. lxii. 30, 31. When an ox or bullock had horns and hoofs, he was judged fit to be offered up in sacrifice ; yet how fit soever he was, the offering of praise and thanksgiving was even in those days the more acceptable sacrifice unto God : and therefore David used to offer it up seven times a day ; *seven times a day*, saith he, *do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments*, Psal. cxix. 164. not that he stinted himself to so many times and no more, but that seven times a day was the least that he usually did it : for he being a man after God's own heart, could not but take all occasions of admiring and praising his great name ; which offering themselves continually, he could not but continually do it, as we see all along in the psalms composed by him, which are all but as one continued song of praise and thanksgiving unto the most high God. And if we would always please God, we also must be always praising of him ; wheresoever we are, still lifting up our hearts unto him,

in praise and thanksgiving for the mercies we receive continually from him, *speaking to ourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts unto the Lord; giving thanks always, for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, Eph. v. 19, 20. from whence we may observe, that this is a duty we ought to be always employed in, and that by this means we make melody in our hearts; unto the Lord, that is, our singing and praising him in our heart, sounds so melodiously in his ears, that he is as much delighted and pleased with it, as a skilful ear is affected with a well-tuned song.

Especially when we meet together in the church-militant, we ought to join with the church-triumphant, in singing hallelujahs to him, calling upon one another to praise the Lord: as David doth no less than four times in one psalm, saying, *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men*, Psal. cvii. and hence it is, that psalms and hymns make so great a part of our public prayers, and renders them so pleasing and acceptable to Almighty God, that they who always join sincerely in them, may be sure that they always please him. But that we may do it the more effectually, we must observe the apostle's rule, (as our church doth in her public Liturgy,) even that our *prayers, supplications and intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority: for this*, saith he, *is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour*, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2, 3. and we must also take all opportunities we can get of receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper; whereby, as we offer unto God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, so he doth thereby assure us of his favour and goodness towards us, (as our church expresseth it,) that he is well-pleased with us, and with what we do: it being only by him, whose body and blood we there receive, that either that

or any other service we perform to God is accepted of him ; as we shall see more presently.

And as for the duties which we owe to one another, Almighty God hath declared himself particularly pleased with children's obedience to parents ; *children, obey your parents in all things ; for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord*, Col. iii. 20. 1 Tim. v. 4.

And also with veracity, justice, and charity : with veracity, or speaking the truth always from the heart ; *for lying lips are an abomination to the Lord : but they that deal truly are his delight*, Prov. xxi. 22. with justice, or dealing honestly and uprightly, so as not to wrong, or cheat, or over-reach one another, but to *do to all men as they would have them do to us, for the false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight*, Prov. xi. 1, 20. yea, *to do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice*, Prov. xxi. 3. and then for charity, or the liberal contribution to the relief of others' necessities, that the apostle calls *an odour of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing unto God*, Phil. iv. 18. and therefore he elsewhere saith, *but to do good, and to communicate, forget not ; for with such sacrifices God is pleased*, Heb. xiii. 16.

There are many other things which God is pleased with ; who indeed is pleased with every thing we do according to his will. But I have instanced more particularly in these, because God himself doth so in his holy word : from whence we may most certainly conclude, that we can never do any thing which God hath commanded, but he is pleased with the doing of it : but more especially if we do not only do it, but patiently suffer also for the doing it ; for *if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God*, 1 Pet. ii. 20.

Acceptable with God, may some say, how can that be ? how can such sinful creatures as we are ever do any thing pleasing or acceptable with God ? are not we

all born in sin? do not we all live in sin? is there a just man upon earth that doth good, and sinneth not? yea, that sinneth not in the very good he doth, by not doing it so well as he ought? how then can we do any thing pleasing to God, who is of *purser eyes than to behold iniquity*, and of so pure and holy a nature, that every sin is an offence to him? how then can we expect that he should have respect to us, or to any thing that we do, seeing we do many things contrary to his will, and nothing exactly according to it.

It is true, if we look no further than ourselves and our own actions, we may justly despair of ever finding any favour in his sight; but have rather cause to expect that he should be angry and displeased with every thing we do, and with ourselves too for the doing of it. But blessed be his name, he himself hath found out a way, whereby what we do imperfectly, may be as acceptable in his sight, as if it was perfectly done; and that is, by his Son Jesus Christ; *to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*, Eph. i. 6, 7 and therefore St. Peter, speaking to all Christians, saith, *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*, 1 Pet. ii. 5. so that he makes us *perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever*, Heb. xiii. 21. from whence it appears, that not only our persons, but our actions too, are acceptable and well-pleasing to God, though not in themselves, yet by Jesus Christ our Lord, in whom he himself once and again declared himself well-pleased, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*; in whom, not only with whom; whereby he hath assured us, that he is not only well-pleased with him, but in him, with all those also who truly believe

in him, and so by faith are united to him, and made members of that body whereof he is head.

And, verily, as this is the only way whereby it is possible for mankind to please God, so this way, even by faith in Christ, some have done it all along, from the very beginning of the world ; as we may see in that famous instance of Abel : for it is written, *that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, an offering to the Lord ; and Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering ; but to Cain and his offering he had not respect*, Gen. iv. 3, 4, 5. from whence it appears, that God had respect unto, that is, he accepted of, or was well-pleased with, Abel's offering, but not with Cain's ; and that they both knew it. But how did they know it ? to wave disputes, it seems more than probable, that God manifested his acceptance of Abel's offering, by consuming it with the fire from heaven : as he did Gideon's, Judges vi. 21. Elijah's, 1 Kings xviii. 38. David's, 1 Chron. xxi. 26. Solomon's, 2 Chron. vii. 1, 3. whereby he signified his acceptance of their offerings, and so he did for the first which Aaron, after his consecration, offered : for when he had slain the bullock and the ram, and laid them in order upon the altar, it is said, *and there came fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering and the fat ; which when the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces*, Lev. ix. 24. which plainly argues, that the people looked upon this as a certain sign that God accepted of the offering, in that they shouted for joy, and adored him for it.

This is that fire which God commanded should be always kept burning upon the altar, Lev. vi. 12. and none of the ordinary sacrifices were accepted of, but such as were consumed by this fire : which therefore was carefully kept burning upon the altar all along till the Babylonish captivity. And if we may believe what is written in the Second Book of Maccabees, chap. i. 19.

it was revived afterwards. But according to the tradition of the Jews, this was one of the five things which were wanting in the second temple. This therefore being the common way whereby God was pleased to express his acceptance of what was offered to him, we may easily conclude, that he manifested his respect to Abel's offering, and not to Cain's, by consuming that with fire, and not the others.

But why had Almighty God respect to Abel's offering, and not to Cain's? To me the reason seems plainly this, that Cain offered only of the fruit of the ground, which had no respect to Christ, but only to God, as the Creator of the world; whereas Abel offered the firstlings of his flock, and the fat thereof, which was a bloody sacrifice, typifying the death of Christ, *the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world*; and so exercised his faith in the promised Messiah. And therefore the apostle saith, *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*, Heb. xi. 4. By faith, that is, by believing the promise which God had made to mankind in Christ, and manifested his faith, by offering such a sacrifice as represented the death of Christ; by whom therefore his sacrifice was well-pleasing and acceptable to God. So *Enoch pleased God*, Heb. xi. 5.

The same may be said of Abraham, who was so highly in the favour of God, that he is called the friend of God, not only by Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xx. 7 but by God himself, saying, *The seed of Abraham my friend*, Isai. xli. 8. And he is the only man we ever heard of, that God himself was pleased in so particular a manner to call his friend: yea, he entered into a strict alliance or covenant with him, as one friend doth with another. But how came God to be so much pleased with Abraham, above all others? doubtless, the reason was, because he excelled others in his faith in the promised seed, that is, in Christ: as St. James intimates, where he saith, *Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness; and he was called the*

friend of God, Jam. ii. 23. because he believed God, when he said, *in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*, therefore he was accepted of as righteous; and therefore was he called the friend of God. Which plainly shews, that the great reason why God was so pleased with Abraham, and with what he did, was upon the account of Christ, because he believed in him, as promised by Almighty God. The same may be said of all the patriarchs, prophets, and saints in the Old Testament, as also of those under the New; for none ever did or can do any thing pleasing and acceptable to God, but only by Jesus Christ our Lord; but by him, there are none of us but may so walk as to please God.

For by him we may be assisted in what we do with the holy Spirit of God himself, who proceeding as from the Father, so likewise from the Son, cannot but actuate and influence all that are by faith united to him, and made sound members of his body; by which means his grace is always sufficient for them; his strength is made perfect in their weakness, and the power of Christ rests continually upon them, 2 Cor. xii. 9. the word is ἐπισκευή, it dwells in a peculiar manner in them, as the שכינה, or divine presence, did in the temple. Hence every true Christian may say with the apostle, *I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me*, Phil. iv. 13. the Holy Ghost himself being, as the same apostle speaks, *shed on them abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Lord*, Tit. iii. 5, 6. by whom therefore they are enabled not only to walk worthy of God, but likewise unto all well-pleasing; for God is always well-pleased with what he himself doth; but what they do, is done by him, and his holy Spirit, working in them both to will and to do: and therefore it cannot but be acceptable to him, at least so far as it proceedeth from himself, and is begun, carried on, and finished by his own holy Spirit co-operating with them.

But notwithstanding the supernatural grace which

we receive from God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, yet, by reason of the corruption of our nature, and our manifold infirmities, we cannot, or at least we do not, make that use of it, as thereby to adjust any of our actions perfectly to the will of God : but do what we can, we either go beyond or come short of it. And although, so far as his own grace concurs in what we do, so far it is, doubtless, pleasing to God ; yet so far as we ourselves are concerned (as we always are) in any action, so far it is imperfect, and therefore must needs offend him, whose nature is perfection itself. Hence therefore our blessed Saviour, to put us into a capacity of pleasing God, doth not only assist us with his own grace in what we do, but hath made satisfaction also for our failures in the doing of it ; for he was made a *propitiation for our sins*, 1 John ii. 1 for all our sins, not only for others, but likewise for those sins which God's all-seeing eye observes in our best performances : yea, *he who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*, 2 Cor. v. 21 that is, that although we are not perfectly so in ourselves or actions, yet God might accept of us as righteous in him, by virtue of that perfect obedience and righteousness which he performed in our nature and stead ; who is therefore said to be made our *righteousness*, as well as our *sanctification*, 1 Cor. i. 30. our sanctification to assist us in what we do, and our righteousness to make it acceptable to God when it is done. But for both these purposes, it is necessary that we actually believe in him ; for it is to our faith in Christ, that the Scriptures all along ascribe both our sanctification, and likewise the justification both of our persons and our actions before God, Heb. xi. 6.

By these things, thus briefly touched upon, you may easily perceive how you may so walk as to please God : for do but sincerely endeavour, to the utmost of your knowledge and power, to do all such good works as God hath prepared for you to walk in, *and whatsoever*

ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, Col. iii. 17 so as to believe and trust on him at the same time, both for his assisting of you in the doing it, and for God's acceptance of it when it is done, and then you may be confident, that God, for his sake, will be well-pleased with what you do, as well as he is with the most perfect services of the glorious saints and angels in heaven.

And, verily, it is well for us that we have such a Mediator and Advocate, who is able to make up all differences, to reconcile Almighty God our Maker to us, and to prevail with him to accept of any thing that we do ; for otherwise what a sad condition had we all been in ? he that made us would have been always angry and displeased with us : and what the effects of that would be, no tongue is able to express. God grant, that none of us may ever experience it. Methinks I cannot so much as think of it without horror and dread, lest I myself, or any one here present, should fall under his displeasure. If his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little, what can we do ? whither can ye go for shelter ? Shall we go to the saints and angels in heaven ? they cannot help us if they would. Shall we go to the fiends of hell ? they will not help us if they could. Shall we go to our fellow-mortals upon earth ? they neither can nor will help us, their hands and their hearts too being wholly at his command ; so that he can arm them all, when he pleases, against us, and make every thing that is, a distinct executioner of his divine vengeance upon us ; yea, he can set us against ourselves, and make our own consciences fly like so many furies in our faces, and rack and torment us continually. He can make all things run cross to us, and vex us ; yea, he can make us vexed at every thing, whether any thing gives us any cause or no. And that which is worst of all, he can make us possess all our iniquities together, and fill our souls with such a sense of his wrath and indignation against us for them, that we should not be able to en-

dure ourselves, nor bear up under it, but should immediately sink down to nothing, if he himself did not uphold us by his almighty power, for the honour of his justice, and to make us know and feel what it is to offend our Maker. This, and infinitely more than we are able to conceive, he can do, not only at what time he will, but to all eternity. Can, did I say? yea, and will too, unless we take care to appease his wrath we have already kindled, and to walk for the future so as to please him.

But how happy must they needs be, who always do so! who always please God! who please him that made and governs the whole world! they can want nothing, having him who hath all things to supply them. They can desire nothing that is good for them, but they may have it at any time for asking. *Whatsoever we ask, saith St. John, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight,* 1 John iii. 22. they can be no where but they have the best company in the world, for they have him that made it always with them, not only by his essential, but by his special and peculiar presence, to direct them by his wisdom, to assist them by his grace, to comfort them by his Spirit, to protect them by his power, and to bless and prosper them by his goodness in all their undertakings. As they walk with God, he walks with them, so as never to leave or forsake them in the least: *He that sent me, saith Christ, is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him,* John viii. 29.

Moreover, so long as you please God, ye need not care who is displeased with you. If he be your friend, it is no matter what enemies you have? for *when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him,* Prov. xvi. 7 he hath the hearts of all men in his hand, and can turn and wind them which way he will. He can allay their choler, assuage their wrath, restrain their fury, and turn their

hatred into love and friendship. He gave Joseph favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison, Gen. xxxix. he gave Daniel love and favour in the eyes of the prince of the eunuchs, Dan. i. Psal. cvi. 46. and so he can give you favour, when he pleaseth, in the sight of the worst enemies you have in the world, so as to make them your best friends : and how long soever he may suffer their choler to boil in their breasts, he can keep it from breaking forth either at their hands or tongues ; so that whatsoever they think, or wish, they shall not be able to speak or do you any ill : as we see in David, who being a man after God's own heart, though Saul hated him mortally, and hunted him like a partridge upon the mountains, yet he could never catch him, nor come near to hurt him. And so long as the children of Israel pleased God, though all the kingdoms and nations about them were their enemies, *he suffered no man to do them wrong, but reprov'd even kings for their sakes ; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,* Psal. cv. 14, 15. thus whatsoever grudge or hatred they bear you, God can so order it, if he please, that they shall never do you any mischief, but shall live as peaceably with you, as if they were your friends. And as he can do it if he pleases, so you may be sure he will be pleased to do it, if you continue to please him.

Neither will he make only such enemies as ye have among men to be at peace with you, but he will cause other creatures to be so too ; *for thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee,* Job v. 23. and lest this should seem strange or impossible, that the very beasts and stones should enter into the league with men, God hath said, that he himself will undertake it ; *In that day, saith he, will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and the creeping things of the ground,* Hos. ii. 18. that is, he will take care that no creature shall hurt those who please

him their Creator. As we see he hath done all along. The water that drowned the Egyptians, made way for the children of Israel to pass through it: the fire could not scorch one hair of the three children that were thrown into the furnace: the hungry lions could not seize upon Daniel, when he was in the den, in the midst of them: and though a viper fastened upon St. Paul's hand, it fell off again without doing any harm. The same may be said of the powers of hell, they may shew their malice, but they cannot execute it, as Balaam found by experience, saying, *Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel*, Numb. xxiii. 23. thus all they who please God, are always safe and secure from danger; they need not fear what men or devils, or any creature in the world, can do unto them. So long as the Creator himself is pleased with them, though all creatures in heaven and earth should combine together, they could not hurt them.

Not hurt them, did I say? so far from that, that the whole creation, and all and every thing that is in it, shall concur to do them good; *for we know*, saith the apostle, *that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*, Rom. viii. 28. and it cannot be otherwise; for all things depending every thing one upon another, and all upon God, acting and moving under him, they cannot but always produce what he pleaseth. But he is always pleased to do them good who please him: and therefore all things being influenced by him, must needs do so too. By which means they are as happy as all the creatures in the world can make them.

But above all, they who please God, are happy upon that very account, because they please God: because they please him who is the centre and the fountain of all the happiness that mankind is capable of, and communicates it to all those and to none but those, who please him, by manifesting himself to be pleased with them; *in his plea-*

sure is life, said David, Psal. xxx. 5. that is, all the joy and happiness of the soul, it all not only depends upon, but consisteth in, the favour and pleasure of God.

To have the light of his countenance shining upon us, and by it to behold his special love and kindness to us, his pleasure and delight in us, and shewing himself to be reconciled to us, and well-pleased with us; this is that blessed sight, which we call the beatific vision, the sight that fills the soul with love, and light, and joy, and bliss, and happiness, as full as ever it can hold. This is the greatest, or rather, the only true happiness that our souls are capable of. And so far as we please God, so far we may partake of it, even in this life: but in the next, we shall have it perfectly, because we shall perfectly please God for ever.

These things being duly weighed, are sufficient to prevail with all sober and considering persons, to make it their great care and design, for the future, to please God, and to approve themselves to him, in every thing they think, or speak, or do. Wherefore I need say no more, but shall conclude, as I began, with the words of my text, *furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.*

S E R M O N CXXIV.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MATT. xiii. 18.

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

AMONG the great blessings which this kingdom enjoys above most others, there is none greater than that the pure word of God is so constantly read and preached in it, and that by officers authorized and appointed by Christ himself, and therefore assisted by his holy Spirit in the doing of it. By which means, one would think, that the whole nation in general, and all particular persons in it, should be wise, and holy, and just, and good, every way such as God would have them, seeing they have his will so fully revealed to them, by his word sounding continually in their ears, and set before their eyes too, in as clear a light as ever shone upon earth, since the *Sun of righteousness* himself was here. And yet, to our great astonishment and admiration, as well as to our grief and sorrow, we may observe, that a great part of this nation, if not the far greatest, are as ignorant of God, as negligent of their duty to him, as envious and malicious against one another, as proud, as factious, as intemperate, as lascivious, as unjust, as uncharitable, every way as vicious in their lives and actions, as if they had never heard one tittle of God's word in all their lives.

This I have often thought of: and have as often wondered what should be the reason of it. Many have

offered themselves as concurring towards it ; but I could never be fully satisfied about it, but from this parable of the sower ; wherein Christ himself hath given us the best and clearest account of it, that ever was or can be given. For indeed none else could ever truly do it, but he who knows men's hearts, and sees how his word is received therein, what impediments it meets with at its entrance, what entertainment it hath when gotten in, and how it comes to pass that it is sometimes kept, and sometimes cast out again. Men can only guess at these things, but Christ knows them perfectly ; and therefore hath been pleased to give us a perfect account of the whole matter in this parable, beginning ver. 3.

3. *Behold, saith he, a sower went forth to sow.*

4. *And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up.*

5. *Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth : and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth :*

6. *And when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root, they withered away.*

7. *And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them.*

8. *But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.*

This is the parable itself, which when our Lord had uttered, and had resolved the disciples' question, why he spoke to the people in parables, he explains to them the full meaning of it ; and that they might take the more notice of it, he begins with these words, *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower* : as if he had said, Ye that are my disciples and apostles, and so must both learn my mind yourselves, and teach it to others, do ye hearken diligently to this parable, for it will be of great use to you in both respects.

And so verily it is, both to the ministers that preach, and to the people that hear the word of God. It is of

great use to us, because it shews us the reason why our ministry is not always so successful as we could wish it was. For ye may easily imagine, that it is a great trouble and discouragement to us to preach the word of God time after time, for many years together, and yet see little or no effect of it upon those who hear us : but after we have done and said all we can, most part of them are not one jot the wiser or the better for what we have said or done. Though we tell you what Almighty God would have you to believe, yet you will not believe it ; though we tell you what he would have you do, yet ye will not do it : I am sorry I can speak this upon mine own experience. I could instance in several particulars, wherein I have often told you, as plainly as I could, what duties you ought to perform to God, but I see, as plainly, that ye do not perform them. And this is the case of most ministers : I wish I could not say of all. All that we say, is like water spilt upon the ground ; or, as the apostle expresseth it, it is but beating the air ; men give us the hearing, and that is all. Which we cannot but all be troubled at ; for it makes us sometimes suspect that the fault is in ourselves, that we do not do our duty as we ought ; that we do not preach often enough, or not plain enough, or not pressing enough, or some way or other fail in the discharge of the office, which God hath committed to us, notwithstanding that we take all the care that we can in it. The thoughts of which would be enough to dishearten us from going on, lest we should enhance our own reckoning at the last day, but that our great Master himself hath shewn us, in this parable, that the fault is chiefly in the people ; that although we do our duty never so well, yet we must not always expect that success which we desire of it ; for there is still something or other in the people that hinders it. Though the seed we sow be never so good, and though we sow it with all the care and prudence that we can, yet, after all, the most part of it will be lost, because the ground

we sow it in is bad ; so bad, that we have great cause to bless God, if any of it comes to perfection.

And as we who preach, so ye that hear the word of God, may be much edified by this parable. I say, may, not will be ; for I fear that my preaching upon it will have no more effect, than what is intimated in the parable itself, such as other sermons use to have, that is, very little, if any at all. But if ye be not wanting to yourselves in hearkening to it, I am sure ye may receive great instruction and edification from it : for ye cannot but be sensible of your great unprofitableness under the means of grace, having heard many hundreds, perhaps several thousands of sermons in your life, and yet are no way the better for it, if not much worse ; and ye cannot but wonder what should be the reason of it. But here ye have the reason of it plainly set down before your eyes ; you may see where the fault lies, and, by consequence, if ye have any regard for your souls, mend it for the future. Which that ye may, I would desire you to apply what is said all along, every one to himself, and consider which part of the parable toucheth him, or cometh the nearest to his case : for there is not one person in the congregation, but what is particularly concerned in something or other that is said in it, as ye will all find, by the time that we have gone quite through it.

But before we descend to the part of it, there are several things worthy to be observed in the whole. For here we may first observe in general, that the seed that was sown was all of the same sort, and of the same goodness : there was not one sort of seed sown in bad ground, and another in good, but the same in both ; and therefore the reason why it grew better in one place than another, could not be from the seed itself. And so the reason why the word preached profits some more than others, cannot be from the word itself, for that is the same in all.

Secondly, we may observe, that as the seed was the

same, so was the sower. *Behold*, saith Christ, *a sower went forth to sow* : one sower : the seed was all sown by the same hand ; with the same art and care : and therefore the fault could not be in the sower, no more than in the seed, why any of it perished. So here, although the same preacher preacheth the same word of God, yet it hath not the same effect upon all ; but some are profited by it, others not : which therefore cannot be imputed to the preacher.

Thirdly, we may likewise observe, that as the same sower sowed the same seed, so he did it at the same time ; for he went forth but once : he did not sow some seed at one time of the year, and some at another ; then the season or the weather might have made great alteration ; but he sowed it altogether : and therefore neither can the seasonableness nor unseasonableness of the time be pleaded, why some should grow better than other. And so it is in preaching, although the same person preacheth the same word of God, at the same time, yet it shall not have the same effect upon all ; but some are edified by it, others not. And it cannot be said that it was in season to those, and out of season to these ; for the season was one and the same to both.

In the next place, we may observe, that although the seed, the sower, and the time, was all one and the same, yet the event was different four several ways : some was picked up by the birds, some withered away, some was choked with thorns, and some brought forth fruit. And there are as many differences in hearing God's word ; some do not mind it ; some mind it, but do not retain it ; some retain, but do not practise it ; and some mind, retain, and practise it too.

Lastly, we may observe, that of these four events of the seed sown, three were bad, and but only one good ; for three parts were lost, to one that came to perfection : and it would be well if the difference was no

greater in the word preached, if but one in three could be wrought upon effectually by it. But we have just cause to fear, that this is the least, especially in our age, wherein it is rare to find one in ten, or perhaps in twenty, that set themselves in good earnest, to avoid what they hear to be forbidden, and to do what they hear to be commanded by God. But whatsoever the event be, the word must be preached, the seed must be sown ; and therefore I shall scatter it among you, and do ye take care to improve it, every one to his own advantage, that ye may not be in the number of any of the three first, but of the last sort of hearers, mentioned in this parable, such as profit by what they hear, so as to bring forth fruit meet for repentance.

For which purpose, we shall now consider the several parts of the parable ; and that ye may understand them all the better, I shall set them down as they lie in order, each part distinctly by itself, and then explain the meaning which Christ himself hath given us of it ; and commanded us to take special notice of it, saying, *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.*

First, therefore, *Behold*, saith our Lord, *a sower went forth to sow : and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up ;* St. Luke adds, that *it was trodden down*, as seed that is sown by the way-side use to be by passengers. But as St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, have all recorded this parable, as being of great use to the church, so they all agree in saying, that *the fowls of the air devoured the seed by the way-side.*

Now let us hear our Saviour's explication of it ; *When*, he saith, *any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart : this is he which receiveth seed by the way-side*, Matt. xiii. 19. St. Luke expresseth it something plainer, saying, *Those by the way-side are they that hear ; then*

cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved, Luke viii. 12.

By comparing these and likewise St. Mark's Gospel together, we may easily understand what is meant in the parable by the seed, by the sower, by the way-side, by the fowls of the air, and how and why they devoured it.

By *the seed*, is meant *the word of the kingdom*, as St. Matthew calls it, or, as St. Luke, *the word of God*, the great King of heaven and earth, the word which he hath spoken, and caused to be written down concerning his kingdom of grace and glory. St. Mark calls it κατ' ἐξοχὴν, *the word*, as infinitely exceeding all the words that ever were or can be spoken by men. And this word may well be compared to seed, as appearing but small and contemptible, and yet having such a prolific and generative faculty in it, that it increaseth and multiplies, and brings forth fruit, according to the nature of the ground, as all seed commonly doth where it is sown.

By *the sower*, is meant Christ; as he himself saith in another parable in this chapter, *He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man*, Matt. xiii. 37. it is he by whom the word of God hath been spoken and dispersed all along, and still is: we are only his ambassadors, preaching only his word, and that too only in his name and in his stead, 2 Cor. v. 20. and therefore, as the Thessalonians did, so should all men receive it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, 1 Cor. ii. 13. it is his word that we preach and publish; and no man taketh this office upon him, but he who is called and ordained to it by Christ himself: as no man soweth in the field but the master himself, or such of his servants as he appoints and sends out to do it; and if any other presume to do it, it is an enemy, that doth not sow wheat, but tares.

By *the way-side*, is meant such as hear the word, but do not understand it, or, as the word signifies, *do*

not regard or mind it ; it doth not sink into them, no more than seed that is sown upon an hard path-way, it lies upon the surface, making no impression at all upon their hearts : though they hear it sounding in their ears, they take but little notice of it ; for their hearts all the while *go after their covetousness*, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. their thoughts are generally taken up with other things ; one is thinking of his goods ; another of his houses or lands ; a third of his chapmen ; a fourth of his debtors or creditors ; a fifth of his relations or acquaintance ; a sixth of something he did yesterday ; a seventh of something he is to do to-morrow or next day. And so through the whole congregation, though two perhaps may not think of the same thing, there is scarce one but who is thinking of something or other besides the word they hear, which hinders that from having any power at all upon their minds, unless it be perhaps to slight and despise it ; as many do, according to what is intimated in the parable, by the seed's being trodden down : for many undervalue the word itself, and trample it under their feet, as not worthy to be regarded by them. It is too plain, or else too pricking ; it is no more than what they knew before, or that which they do not care to know. When St. Paul was preaching, the Athenian philosophers cried out, *What will this babbler say*, Acts xvii. 17 and when he spake of the resurrection of the dead, *some mocked*, ver. 52. when Christ himself was preaching, the Pharisees derided him, Luke xvi. 14. and though they would sometimes come to hear him, it was only to see if they could catch something out of his mouth, *that they might accuse him*, Luke xi. 54. there are many such hearers of God's word as these, I wish there be not many here at this time. But to all such, the word of God is like seed sown in the way-side, ready to be caught up and devoured by the fowls of the air.

By *the fowls of the air*, is meant the wicked one, that is, satan, or the devil, who is called the *prince of the*

power of the air, Eph. ii. 2. he and his fiends are always hovering about in the air, especially where the word of God is preached, as birds do over ground that is newly sown, that he may catch up that which falls by the way-side, as soon as he can. He useth all his art to make people dull and sleepy, that they may not hearken at all to the word : and if that will not do it, but they are fully awake, he presents them with one object or other to divert their thoughts ; or so soon as sermon is done, he brings somebody to them to talk of worldly affairs, or else finds them work at home : and all to put what they have heard out of their minds, lest they should ruminate upon it, and so digest it into good nourishment for their souls : not that he cares for it himself. It is said indeed, that the fowls of the air devour the seed, but not that the devil devours the word, but only that he catcheth and taketh it away : he doth not devour it ; it is no food for him, as being quite contrary to his wicked temper, so that the very thoughts of it, put him into a fit of trembling, as St. James saith, *the devils believe and tremble*, Jam. ii. 19. but why then doth the devil take so much pains to take the word out of men's hearts ? St. Luke saith, he doth it, *lest they should believe and be saved* : though he hath no appetite to the word, he hath a mind to devour those that hear it, and therefore *walketh about seeking whom he may devour*, 1 Pet. v. 8. but if God's word should continue any time in men's minds, and they should seriously think upon it, they would *believe and be saved*, which would spoil his game ; for then he can never get them into his clutches : and that is the reason that he useth so many tricks to keep men from believing what they hear, as knowing well enough, if he can do that, let them hear as long as they please, they will be never the better ; for the word preached never profits, except it be *mixed with faith in them that hear it*, Heb. iv. 2. and it works effectually only in them that believe, 1 Thess. ii. 13. and therefore the devil's great design is to keep men from

attending, considering, and meditating upon what they hear, so as to believe it as the word of God. And if they do not believe, he is as sure to have them, as they are sure to be saved if they do.

Hence ye may see where the fault lies, that ye so often hear God's word to no purpose, receiving no profit at all by it: the reason is, because ye do not come rightly prepared and disposed for it, with holy resolutions to believe and practise what ye shall hear, and therefore are careless and negligent in hearing it: ye do not set yourselves in good earnest to attend wholly to it; and to receive it as the word of God; but hear it only by the by; so that it is only as seed scattered by chance on the high-way, which the devil observing, takes advantage of it, and by one device or other puts it quite out of your minds again; so that ye have no more benefit by it, than as if ye had never heard it. The fault is first in yourselves, otherwise the devil could have no power over you: but when he finds that ye keep no strict guard upon yourselves in hearkening to God's word, nor lay it seriously to your hearts, as ye ought, he bewitcheth and enchants you, so that ye never think of it any more, at least so as to observe and keep it: as the apostle said to the Galatians, *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you*, Gal. iii. 1 who hath bewitched you? it is the devil; you being foolish and unmindful of your own good, he bewitcheth you so, that although you hear the word of God over and over again, yet ye will not obey it; but are like the seed by the way-side, that never brings forth fruit.

Next to those seeds which thus fell by the way-side, as it follows in the parable, *some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had not root, they withered away*, Matt.

xiii. 5, 6. the meaning whereof is thus explained by our Saviour : *But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it ; yet he hath not root in himself, but dureth for a while : for when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, by and by he is offended,* ver. 20, 21. so offended as to *fall away*, as St. Luke expresseth it, Luke viii. 13.

Here we have another sort of unprofitable hearers described, who attend to the word preached, and receive it not as the first did, only upon the top, but into their hearts and affections ; for they receive it with joy and gladness, being very much pleased with the good news of the Gospel, to hear of the pardon of their sins, of God's sending his Son to be their Saviour, of his dying for them, and of their obtaining eternal salvation by him : this affects them so, that they begin to walk in the way to life, and make some progress in it ; but they do not go far, the least rub they meet with puts them out of the way. The word they heard was like seed sown in stony places, or upon a rock, as it is in St. Luke, where it hath some, but very little, earth, enough to cover it, that the birds might not pick it up, but not enough for the root to spread in ; and therefore it may lie there for some time ; but when the weather grows hot, it is scorched, and, having no root, withers away.

There have been many such hearers of God's word ; such were the common people among the Jews, who heard Christ gladly, Mark xii. 37. but afterwards cried out, *Crucify him, crucify him* : such was Herod, who feared John the Baptist, and *when he heard him preach, he did many things, and heard him gladly*, Mark vi. 20. but for all that, he afterwards beheaded him : such was Agrippa, when he said to St. Paul, upon his preaching of God's word, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*, Acts xxvi. 28. but, after all, would not be one : such was the young man in the Gospel, who asked our Saviour, what he must do that he might have

eternal life ? and therefore was, doubtless, very well disposed to do any thing for it ; but when Christ told him, that he must sell all and follow him, *he went away sorrowful*, Matt. xix. 21. such were many of Christ's own disciples, who had heard gladly a good while, but when he had preached to them about his being the bread of life, because they did not understand him, *went back, and walked no more with him*, John vi. 66. There are many such amongst us at this time, who hear the word of God gladly, who do many things cheerfully, who are almost persuaded to be Christians, who delight in drawing nigh to God, and performing their devotions to him, who take a great deal of pains in serving God, and doing good for some time, perhaps for a good while ; but *when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word*, when they cannot perform their duty to God, without trouble or danger to themselves, when they must not only do, but suffer also for Christ if they will continue with him, then they are *offended and fall away*, leaving him and his service for the drudgery of sin, the world, and the devil ; and all because they were not well settled in religion, the root of *the matter* was not in them, as Job speaks, Job xix. 28. or as St. Paul, they were not *rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith*, Col. ii. 7. but like the seed that was sown upon a rock, where having no root, it must needs wither away.

The third and last sort of seed, in the parable, which brought forth no fruit, were those which *fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them*, Matt. xiii. 7. In St. Luke it is, *συμφύεῖσαι αἱ ἄκανθαι*, *the thorns sprung up together with the seed, and so choked it*, by overpowering it, and forcing that nourishment from it, which would have enabled it to bring forth fruit : but how could that be ? do thorns use to grow up together with corn ? I answer, it may well be so, supposing that the seed was sown in a ground where thorns were lately cut down ; and the roots left in the

ground, for then the thorns and the corn might grow up together. But we need not that supposition, to resolve the question ; for though corn doth not, thorns usually grow of themselves. There must be plowing, and sowing, and a great deal of pains taken to make corn grow : but the ground naturally brings forth briars and thorns, ever since it was cursed for man's sake ; when God said to Adam, upon his eating of the forbidden fruit, *Cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field.* In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, Gen. iii. 17, 18, 19. which threatening we see fulfilled to this day : for bread cannot be eaten, because corn, of which it is made, doth not grow without the sweat of men's brows ; but as for thorns and thistles, men need not labour for them, the ground brings them forth of itself, as God said it should, by the same almighty word, whereby he commanded it before to bring forth grass for the use of men : and therefore thorns may be well supposed to grow in any ground where seeds are sown, and to grow up with it, as it is supposed to do in the parable.

But let us now hear the meaning of this part of the parable ; *He also, saith our Saviour, that received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful,* ver. 22. To the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, St. Mark adds, *the lusts and desires of other things* : and so St. Luke reckons them up by the name of the *cares, riches, and pleasures of this life*, which, according to St. John, make up the sum-total of this world, and all that is in it, 1 John ii. 16. These are those thorns which choke the seed when it is grown up ; for this seed was not sown by the way-side, so as to be devoured by the birds, nor upon a rock, so as to have no depth of

earth to take root in, but it was sown in plowed mellow ground, where it had good rooting, so that the stalk sprung up to the very ear ; yet, after all, the thorns that grew up with it, hindered it from ripening.

There be many such hearers of God's word, who are not so careless of what they hear as to suffer the devil to take it from them, nor so ill-grounded in religion, as not to understand what they ought to believe and do, but hear the word, so as to mind it, and in some measure endeavour to live according to it ; and this also to the very time of harvest, or all their life long, so that there seem to be great hopes of fruit in them ; and yet the cares, the riches, or the pleasures of this life spoil all, so that nothing comes to perfection ; though their minds be never so well cultivated by the word, and ready to bring forth fruit meet for repentance, yet they cannot do it, being overpowered by some thing or other in this world. They take some care to serve God, but more to serve the world ; they have some desire of heavenly, but more of earthly riches ; they take some delight in doing good, but more in other things. And so all the good inclinations which the word of God had wrought in their hearts, are overcome and stifled, either with the cares, or with the riches, or else with the pleasures of this life.

First, the cares of this life are of such a suffocating nature, that they will suffer nothing that is good to thrive near them ; though a man be never so well disposed, if his thoughts are distracted and perplexed about worldly affairs, it is impossible he should either be or do good ; this is the great argument which Christ himself useth against the cares of this life ; *No man, saith he, can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon :* and then adds, *therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life,* Matt. vi. 24, 25. implying, that so long as men do that, it is in vain to think of serving

God, for no man's mind can possibly be intent upon two things so contrary to one another. And therefore he whose thoughts are taken up with getting, or keeping, or doing any thing of this world, may talk of religion if he please, but he can never practise it: do what he can, his worldly cares will blunt his desires of doing good, so that he shall never do it; and choke all the sense of God and goodness that was ever sown in his heart, at least so far that it shall never produce any fruit that is truly ripe and good.

And so do riches also very often do of themselves, although a man hate them already, and so is not over-careful about them; for they are very deceitful, they cheat and seduce men into such a conceit of this world, as damps all their endeavours after a better. We have a sad instance of this in the young man, who bade very fair for heaven, when he came to Christ to know the way thither, and told him, that he had kept the commandments from his youth; but when Christ said, he must *sell all, and give to the poor, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions*, Matt. xix. 22. he had great possessions, and he would not part with them for it, how great a mind soever he had to go to heaven; and so they were plainly the thorns which choked all the good seed that had been sown in his heart.

The same may be said of the pleasures of this life, or, as St. Mark calls them, the lusts or desires of other things besides riches: for not only such carnal and sensual pleasures as are in themselves sinful, but all love, desire, and delight in any thing upon earth, if it be once immoderate and excessive, it turns a man's mind upside down, it hinders his growth in grace, it chokes the word whensoever he hears it, and he also becomes unfruitful.

These are the three sorts of hearers, which are only hearers. We come now to those who are not *hearers only, but doers of the word*: these are thus represented to us in the parable; *but other seed fell into good*

*ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold, Matt. xiii. 8. the meaning of which is thus explained in St. Matthew ; but he that received seed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty, ver. 23. and to the same purpose in St. Luke ; but that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience, Luke viii. 15. where we may observe in general, that of the three unprofitable hearers, the first heard the word, but did not mind it ; the second minded it for a while, but did not keep it ; the third kept it, but did no good with it : but these fruitful hearers do all that those did, and more ; they hear so as to mind it, they mind it so as to keep it, and they keep it so as to use and improve it, to God's glory and their own good. And the reason is, because these do not receive the seed of God's word as the first did, *by the way-side* : nor as the second, *upon a rock*, or stony heart ; nor as the third, *among thorns* ; but they receive it with an *honest and good heart*, the proper soil for good works to grow in.*

First, they hear *with an honest and good heart* ; they do not come to church only out of custom, to please their friends, or to be thought religious ; neither do they come to sleep, and pass away their time to no purpose ; much less do they come to catch up something to throw at the preacher : but they come with an honest and good design, to hear God's word, to know his pleasure, to understand what he would have them believe and do, that they may obtain and continue in his favour ; how they may serve and honour him in this world, so as to see and enjoy him in the next. And therefore, all the while they hear the word, they keep their minds intent upon it, and their hearts open ready to receive it, *not as the word of men, but*

as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh in them that believe, 1 Thess. ii. 13. and that it may do so in them, they mix it with a quick and lively faith, believing it, though it be never so much above their understanding, as firmly as if it was within the compass of it. They regard not whether what is taught them be high or low, nor whether what is required of them be hard or easy; that is all one to them; it is the word of God, and they are resolved to frame their faith and manners according to it: to believe what he hath said, to avoid what he hath forbidden, to perform what he hath commanded, to fear what he hath threatened, and to trust on what he hath promised, whatsoever come of it. For which purpose they do not pick and choose, take one thing and slip another, but they take all together, as much as ever they can, and that too, not only in their minds and memories, but into their very hearts and souls, all their affections being moved suitably to what they hear. By which means the word of God is quite another thing to them, than it is to other people. Other people only hear it sounding in their ears, these feel it working in their hearts, and taking root there.

Hence, in the next place, these as they hear, so they keep and retain the word in *an honest and good heart*; they set a guard about it, that nothing may come near to hurt it: they lay it up in the bottom of their hearts, where the fowls of the air, the devil, can never reach it. The seed is sown in a soft and deep soil, where it hath liberty and room enough to spread its root, and to cover it, so that no heat can scorch it: and when it puts forth the blades, there are no thorns to choke it; for there is no such thing as worldly care in an honest and good heart; for that is got above this world, and therefore cannot be disturbed or perplexed with any thing that is in it. And hence it is, that the word these hear, abides by them; it is ingrafted into them, as the apostle speaks, James i. 21. and so diffuseth its virtue

and energy all over them, influencing all powers and faculties of their souls, so as to put them upon constant and sincere endeavours to do all the good works which God hath set them. Like good seed, which, being sown in a good soil, always brings forth good fruit, *first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*, as Christ himself speaks upon another occasion, Mark iv. 28. and this too, not in any small proportion, like bad seed in a barren ground, but *some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty*; which is the last thing to be considered.

And here we may take notice, that all who hear the word of God with an honest and good heart, bring forth fruit; fruit, like the heart from whence it springs, honest and good: they all are duly affected with what they hear, they all strive to live answerable to it; they all improve it as well as they can; but not all alike, or in the same measure; for some have more strength and greater opportunities than others: and therefore, some bring forth more fruit, others less, but still all some. And it is to be observed, that as our Lord here describes three sorts of fruitless hearers, so he divides those who bear fruit also into three ranks: whereof the first bears an *hundred fold*; the second, *sixty*; and the last *thirty fold*.

An *hundred fold*, I confess, is extraordinary; it is but seldom that so much is brought forth by one seed, but sometimes it is: so, though it be but seldom, yet sometimes the word of God hath extraordinary success in those who hear it, with honest and good hearts, raising them above the ordinary pitch of good men, and enabling them to do such good works as are extraordinary, either for number, or quality, or both. Such was the effect which Christ's word had upon St. Paul, when of a persecutor it made him an indefatigable preacher of the Gospel, and afterwards a martyr for it. There have been some such extraordinary Christians in most ages, made so by the extraordinary power of Christ's word

upon them, whereby, though they have not arrived at the state of perfection, yet they have come so near it, as to live continually above this world, to exercise themselves in all manner of good works, to devote their lives wholly to God's service, and at last lay them down for his sake. This is extraordinary, and therefore may well be meant by the seed's increasing to *an hundred fold*.

The next producing *sixty fold*: this also is a very great increase, but much more common than the other. Of this middle rank, are all they who so hear and receive the word as to become strong in faith, zealous of good works, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord with a perfect heart, and a willing mind, continuing instant in prayer, fleeing from all appearance of evil, and catching at all opportunities they can get of doing good, and so shining as lights in the world; who, though they have not the honour which the first had, to sacrifice their lives as a testimony to the truth, and for the glory of God, yet they sacrifice both all their sins and all they have to his honour: they rejoice if they be counted worthy to suffer shame for his name; they take joyfully the spoiling of their goods; they count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord; they can cheerfully suffer the loss of all things, and *count them but dung, that they may win Christ*; and have good ground to hope, that if there be occasion, they shall be willing and ready to die too for his sake, who died for theirs. There always have been, and I do not question but there still are, many such eminent Christians in the world, eminent for their piety, for their justice, for their humility, for their temperance, for their modesty, for their meekness, for their charity, for all sorts of virtues, and for all manner of good works whatsoever. And they are all made so by the mighty power of God's word upon their hearts; which may therefore be truly said to bring forth *sixty fold*.

The last and lowest rank of fruitful seed, is that which

bringeth forth only *thirty fold* ; which, though it be but half the former, is a very good increase : of this sort are those which the apostle calls, *weak in the faith*, Rom. xiv. 1. and *babes in Christ*, who are to be *fed with milk, and not with meat*, 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. they are born again, not of corruptible, but incorruptible seed, by the word of God, but they are, *νεογενετοι*, newly sprung up from that seed, and therefore, *as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby*, 1 Pet. i. 21. ii. 2. being in the number of those who have need of milk, and not of strong meat : *strong meat belonging to those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*, Heb. v. 12, 14. which these have not as yet ; but they desire it heartily, and endeavour after it all they can : they labour day and night to mortify all their sins, and never leave till they have done it effectually : they strive continually against the world, the flesh, and the devil ; and though they cannot as yet overcome them, at least they keep themselves from being overcome by them : they make it their constant care and study to *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless* ; and if they happen to stumble, they immediately get up again, and walk more carefully ever after : they are not as yet come to a *perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*, Eph. iv. 13. *but they grow every day in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, 2 Pet. iii. 18. and therefore, although they have not attained to the first or second rank, so as to produce *an hundred or sixty fold*, yet they also, hearing and keeping the word in an honest and good heart, cannot but bring forth *thirty fold* at least.

Having thus gone through both the parable and the meaning of it, I come now to apply it to you who are here present, to all of you ; for there is not a man or woman, as I observed, in the whole congregation, but who is particularly concerned in one part or other of it.

I shall first speak to the unfruitful, and then to the fruitful hearers of God's word, and to both in the same order as they are described and set down in the parable.

To begin therefore with the lowest and worst sort of hearers, who hear the word of God, but do not mind it. What do you come to church for? it either is the word of God ye hear, or it is not: if it be not, why do ye come to hear it? if it be, why do not ye mind it? Do ye think that Almighty God will suffer his word to be slighted by his own creatures, without inflicting some severe punishment upon you for it? no, *be not deceived, God will not be mocked*: if ye will not mind what he saith unto you now, he will ere long make ye do it whether ye will or no, when he shall pronounce all the curses upon you, which are written in that very word, which ye now despise and take no notice of.

And as for such who do not only hear the word, but are really affected with it, so as to set upon the practice of it for some time, till meeting with difficulties and troubles in it, like seed scorched with the sun, they wither and fall away into their former course of life: to such I shall only say, and yet not I, but the Lord, in the words of his apostle, *if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire*, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21, 22.

But there are many who do not only hear and mind the word, but continue to do so for a great while together, perhaps all their life long, and yet are never the better for it, their hearts being all along overspread with

the perplexing cares of this life, which, like so many thorns, choke the word, and make it unfruitful: these hear only to hear, and mind only to know, not to do their duty. But I would desire such to consider what St. Paul saith, *for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified*, Rom. ii. 13. and what St. James adviseth, *be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves*, Jam. i. 12. for so certainly they do; they do but deceive themselves, who think they are ever the better for hearing God's word, unless they become better by it, so as to do what they hear. Hear what Christ himself saith, *if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*, John xiii. 17 if ye do them, not if ye only know them; for knowing without doing is so far from making you happy, that it will but make you more miserable: ye may be confident of it, for Christ himself saith, *that the servant who knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes*, Luke xii. 47.

God grant that this be not the case of any who hear me at this time, but that ye may all be in the number of the last sort of hearers in the parable, who practised what they heard, and brought forth fruit with patience. I hope there are some such among you; and therefore I have a few things to say to them: whatsoever influence the word of God hath had upon your minds, give him the praise and honour of it; for though Paul himself *planted*, and *Apollos watered*, *it was God that gave the increase*, 1 Cor iii. 6. and as a testimony of your gratitude for it, acknowledge it to be the greatest blessing you ever did or can receive on this side heaven, far greater than if he had given you all the crowns and sceptres upon earth, which, put altogether, are not comparable to one grain of true grace and virtue: and therefore how little soever it be, prize it as your greatest treasure, for it is the pearl of great price.

But, howsoever, do not content yourselves with the

least quantity of it, but strive all ye can to increase and multiply it. If the good seed which was sown in your hearts hath hitherto brought forth but *thirty fold*, from this time forward let it bring forth *sixty*, and, if possible, *an hundred fold*. Do as St. Paul did, *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*, Phil. iii. 13, 14. as ye have hitherto walked so as to please God, now abound more and more: as considering that the more service ye do for God upon earth, the greater shall be the reward that he will give you in heaven; as Christ himself assures you in the parable of the nobleman, who gave to each of his servants one pound; that servant who made no use of his pound, had it taken from him; he that had gained five pounds with it, was made ruler over five cities; and he who had gained ten, was made ruler over ten cities, Luke xix. And so proportionably, the more good works the seed that is sown in your hearts produceth, the greater will be your crop of glory: *wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

S E R M O N CXXV.

THE BLESSING OF PURITY IN HEART.

MATT. v. 8.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

GOD, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son ; who being himself also truly God as well as man, whatsoever he spoke was spoken by God himself : and all his sayings were so many oracles, or divine truths, uttered immediately by divinity and truth itself ; which therefore ought to be hearkened to, received, and believed by us, with the greatest attention, the profoundest reverence, and the strongest faith, that our minds are capable of : insomuch that whatsoever we read or hear of any thing that Christ said, we ought not to doubt in the least of the truth or certainty of it, but conclude it impossible it should be otherwise than just as he said it ; who being of infinite wisdom, cannot be deceived himself ; and being of infinite goodness, cannot deceive us ; or, as the apostle words it, *who cannot lie* ; every falsehood being a contradiction to his very essence, which is justice, truth, and faithfulness itself.

And as all Christ's sayings were thus infallibly true and certain, so were they likewise of infinite weight and moment, and necessary to be known, believed, and ob-

served by all that either heard them, or shall ever hear of them. For as he did not shed his blood, so neither did he ever spend his breath, in vain. He never spake, as we are apt to do, at random, and to no purpose ; but every word that came from his sacred mouth, was sacred as himself, apposite to the purpose, pertinent to the occasion, and of constant and perpetual use to those for whose sake he spake it : so that as whatsoever he suffered was for the expiation of our sins, and whatsoever he did was for the confirmation of our faith, so whatsoever he said was some way or other for the edification and salvation of our souls : and therefore, we who hope to be saved by him, should take special notice of every thing which he said, as being confident it was for our sakes he said it, that we might thereby know what to believe and do, that we may be saved by him ; especially considering that this was the great reason wherefore his divine sayings are so infallibly recorded, and so faithfully transmitted to us, that we might receive the same benefit and comfort from them, as they did who heard them from his own mouth ; which, notwithstanding we can never do, unless we duly weigh, consider, and observe them with that care and diligence, as becometh those who believe them to be the words of the greatest Person, the best Friend, and the only Saviour they have in the whole world.

This I thought good to premise concerning Christ's words in general, the better to dispose and prepare your minds for those impressions, which this divine sentence of his, that I have now read, will make upon them, if you do but consider whose it is, and with how much majesty and authority he pronounced it : for certainly his manner of speaking was every whit as divine as the matter he spake. So that all they who were so near him as to hear him speak, justly *bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth*, Luke iv. 22. yea, the very officers that were sent to take him, when they had once heard him, were

themselves so taken with him, that they could not but confess, that *never man spake like this man*, John vii. 46. and had we stood by him at the same time, we doubtless should have been of the same mind too, catching at every word that dropped from him, and admiring at his way of speaking it, as well as the profound sense that appeared in it. And then how flat and insipid would all the discourses of the greatest philosophers have seemed to us, in comparison of his.

And what though we never heard him speak? yet nevertheless we ought to be as much affected with what he said, as they that did so; forasmuch as we have his divine discourses and sayings exactly related to us, both by them who heard them from his own mouth, and by the same Spirit wherewith he spake them. The only thing that may seem wanting to us is his delivery, or the grave, majestic, and divine way of demeaning himself, and pronouncing his words when he spake: but this defect also may and ought to be supplied by a quick and lively faith, which, as it is the evidence of things not seen, so it represents to us words not heard now, in the same way and manner wherein they were first spoken.

As we therefore believe that Christ himself spake these words, let us, by the assistance of the same faith, conceive in our minds how he spake them: and for that purpose, let us apprehend the infinite, almighty, all-wise, and eternal God, in the nature and likeness of man, sitting upon a mountain, with a great company of people about him, and then on a sudden opening his sacred mouth, that all might hear him, uttering these divine sentences:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God, &c.

Divine sentences indeed ' Methinks I see the rays of divinity shining in every one of them, and in the very voice too, wherewith he pronounced them. Methinks I feel its power and authority working in my breast, and bearing down all before it: and we could not certainly but all do so, if we did but rightly consider and firmly believe, that these words were spoken by Christ, by God himself: and therefore must needs be spoken in the best manner that any tongue could speak them. But howsoever, that they may be sure to have their due effect upon us, let us single out one of these divine sentences, from whence to take our measures of all the rest: and that shall be the last before rehearsed, *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

A sentence as full of divine instruction, advice, and comfort, as so few words can hold; insomuch, that did we but rightly understand all that our Lord meant by it, it would serve us instead of a whole body of practical divinity: and although that may seem, at first sight, to be something difficult to our weak capacities, yet we need not be discouraged from searching after it, seeing he himself is always ready to assist us with the same spirit by which he spake, in finding out the meaning of whatsoever he said; in the humble confidence of which assistance we shall therefore briefly consider, whom he means by the *pure in heart*, what by *seeing God*, how they who are pure in heart shall do it, and how great a blessedness that is to them.

By the heart, therefore we are here to understand the inward and spiritual part of man, his mind or soul, that whereby he thinks, apprehends, judges, and discerns between truth and falsehood, good and evil, right or

wrong, and generally between one thing and another, and accordingly consents or dissents, chooseth or refuseth, loves or hates, desireth or abhorreth, or is any way affected towards what is presented to him; for so the holy Spirit, whereby Christ spake all along in Scripture, useth the word heart for all the powers and faculties of the rational soul, the understanding, will, affections, memory, and conscience; or, in general, for the spirit of a man, the fountain and principal of all human actions, as such: and therefore our Saviour elsewhere saith, that *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things*, Matt. xii. 34, 35. that is, all a man's words and works are such as his heart is, from whence they flow.

Moreover, those things you know are said to be pure, which are just such as they were made and designed to be, without having any thing mixed or incorporated with them, which doth not belong to their own proper nature; wherefore the Greeks usually explain καθαρός, *pure*, by ἀκράτος, and ἀμυγής, *unmixed*. Thus gold is said to be pure, when there is no dross, nor any alloy of other metals in it; honey is said to be sincere and pure, when it is *sine cera*, without wax or other recrements; water is said to be pure, when there is no earth nor other elements in it, nothing but water itself: for whatsoever is heterogeneous, or of another nature, being mixed with a thing, alters the nature of that thing, by communicating something of its own to it, by which means it ceaseth to be purely and entirely the thing itself, and therefore it is truly said to be impure and unclean, because corrupted or polluted by something that should not be there.

Now these things being put together, we may easily discover who may be truly said to be *pure in heart*, even those whose heart or spirit is all heart, all spirit, having nothing in it but what is proper and essential to

it, without the mixture of any thing contrary or disagreeable to the natural temper and constitution of a spirit united to an human body, and informing of it, so as to make up one human person with it: for otherwise it is not purely or wholly the same it should be, there being something in it which should not be there. But the spirit of man, we know, is made in the likeness of God, exactly conformable, as to his nature, so to his law: and so long as it continues such, it is a pure spirit, a pure heart: but if it acteth any thing contrary to the law of God, it acteth contrary to its own nature, and offers that violence to it which cannot but make some alteration in it. But the soul being of itself perfectly good, there can be no alteration made in it, but what must needs be for the worse. Hence therefore every sin or transgression of God's law leaves a *macula*, a spot or blot upon the soul, which stains and sullies it, and so far as that goes, it makes it impure, and different from what God made it; as may be easily seen in every actual sin that a man committeth, much more in habitual sins; for when actual sins are so often multiplied, that they grow up into habits, they destroy and overrun the natural constitution of the soul, by superinducing another and contrary nature into it, whereby it becomes as much aversed from good, and inclined to evil, as it is, in its own proper nature, averse from evil, and inclined to good.

To make this more plain, I might instance in all, especially habitual, customary, or reigning sins, and shew how they spoil, and corrupt, and defile the soul, altering its very frame and temper; which some so plainly do, that they are truly called uncleanness itself: and so may all other sins as well as they. And therefore, together with them, our blessed Saviour himself reckons up *evil thoughts, murders, thefts, false witness and blasphemies, which, proceeding from the heart, defile the man*, Matt. xv. 19, 20. because they defile the principal part of him, his heart or spirit, from whence they

proceed. Where we may observe, that not only the more brutish sins which are committed by the body, but such also as are acted wholly in the heart or mind itself, and go no further, do nevertheless corrupt and defile it, even evil thoughts themselves: as for example, heretical and erroneous thoughts darken the heart or mind that it cannot see: doubtful and unbelieving thoughts shut it up, so that it cannot receive the truth in the love of it: proud and ambitious thoughts swell the heart beyond its due proportion: covetous and earthly thoughts shrink it up into so narrow a compass, that it can reach no further, than to the little inconsiderable things of this world: envious, malicious, and revengeful thoughts fire the heart, and put it into a raging flame and fury: fearful, despairing, and mistrustful thoughts chill it, and make it so cold, stupid, and inactive, that it cannot exert itself, nor employ its powers and faculties as it ought to do: vain, foolish, and impertinent thoughts weaken and debase the mind, by making it spend itself to no purpose: lustful and unclean thoughts ensnare the soul, and subject it wholly to the petulant and unruly humours of the body: profane atheistical thoughts harden the heart, and make it callous and insensible of any difference between good and evil: but repining, discontented, and jealous thoughts fret and gall it, and puts it into such a ferment, that it is always restless and uneasy.

Thus we might easily shew, how all manner of evil and irregular thoughts, that are conceived in the heart, although they are never brought forth into act, do notwithstanding corrupt and pollute the heart, in which they are conceived: as we may see also in the apostate angels, which though they be altogether spiritual creatures, without any body or matter to work upon, yet, by reason of the proud, malicious, and other wicked thoughts that were always rising in them, they are all along in the Gospel called, Ἀκάθαρτα πνεύματα, *impure, unclean spirits*: but, as Job speaks, *the very heavens*

are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water ? Job xv. 15, 16. i. e. who is as prone to sin, as he is to drink when he is a dry ; and doth not only conceive it in his soul, but commits it also with his body. As his mind and conscience is defiled, so is his life and actions : and therefore he is his all over, or, as the psalmist words it, *altogether become filthy*, Psal. xiv. 3.

Hence therefore, in order to the making of our hearts pure, the first thing necessary is, that they be purged and cleansed from all the guilt and filth they have contracted, by sinning against God ; for till that be done, the spirits of fallen men are as impure and unclean in the sight of God as the fallen angels themselves. And hence it is that David prays so earnestly to be cleansed from his *secret faults*, Psal. xix. 12. and when he had defiled himself with sin, he was so vile and loathsome in his own eyes, that he could not endure himself, but begs of God to be cleansed of it, saying, *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow*, Psal. li. 2, 7. And we may all pray the same prayer, as he did, with full assurance of faith, that upon our hearty and sincere repentance God will hear us, in that he hath expressly promised to do it for all who are truly penitent, saying, *I will cleanse them from all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned against me*, Jerem. xxxiii. 8. and elsewhere, *I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you*, Ezek. xxxvi. 25. When a man's heart is thus cleansed from the sins wherewith it was before polluted, then it is rightly prepared for that purity which our Lord here speaks of ; for then it ceases to be an impure and unclean heart. But it cannot properly be said to be pure, until it be restored to the same temper and disposition which it was at first made of : and therefore David, in the place

before quoted, as he prays that God would cleanse him from his sins, so likewise that he would create in him *a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him*; that is, that he would make his heart such a one as it was at first created, and renew his spirit, so as to make it sound and right again, fixed wholly upon God, and set to obey his commandments, as heartily and sincerely as if it never had been corrupted; for hypocrisy and dissimulation destroy and spoil the heart as much as any sin whatsoever. And therefore St. James saith, *cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded*, James iv. 8. implying, that they who are hypocritical and double-minded, have as much need to purify their hearts as the greatest sinners in the world: and the reason is, because their hearts are divided between God and the world, between virtue and vice: and, by consequence, are far from being pure; for a pure heart is always single, and all of a piece, wholly and entirely inclined to God and goodness.

And it is such an heart as this, which our Lord here means; an heart that is not only inclined to God, but to him only, and to nothing else but in obedience or subordination to him; an heart that really loves God above all things else, and all other things only for his sake; an heart that is always flaming up to heaven in ardent and fervent desires to please and honour God in time, and to enjoy him for ever; an heart that sanctifies the Lord of hosts himself, making him its only fear, and its only dread; an heart that is never afraid of evil tidings, but is always fixed, trusting in the Lord; an heart that is continually rejoicing in God, whether it hath or hath not any thing else to rejoice in; an heart that prefers the least duty before the greatest gain, and the greatest suffering before the least sin; an heart that is never shaken either with hopes or fears, but remains stedfast and immoveable as a rock, whether the sun shine, or tempest beat upon it; an heart that is sound in the faith, submissive to the will, obedient

to the law, constant in the service, and zealous for the glory of God ; but meek, and humble, and kind, and gentle, and true, and just, and charitable towards others : in short, an heart that exerciseth itself to have *always a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards men.*

This is a *pure heart* indeed ! but how can we ever make our unclean and sinful hearts thus pure and holy ? for, as the Wise-man observes, *who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin ?* Prov. xx. 9. it is true, we can never do it by our own strength : but, blessed be God, he hath found out a way whereby we may all do it if we will, even by the merits and assistance of his Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, *who*, as St. John saith, *hath washed us from our sins in his own blood*, Rev. i. 5. *which*, as the same apostle elsewhere observeth, *cleanseth us from all iniquity.* So that if we do but *confess our sins*, God, for his sake, *is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*, 1 John i. 7, 9. and as Christ thus gave himself for us, that he might *redeem us from all iniquity*, so likewise that he might *purify us to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*, Tit. ii. 14. and *that he might sanctify and cleanse his church with the washing of water by the word, that he might present to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish*, Eph. v. 26, 27. where we may observe, not only that this was the great end wherefore Christ gave himself for us, that he might make us pure and holy, but likewise how he doth it, even by his word ; as he himself also acquaints his disciples, where he saith to them, *now are ye clean through the word that I have spoken unto you*, John xv. 3. and the reason is, because that by the ministry of his word, God is pleased to convey into us his pure and holy Spirit, which, by degrees, makes our spirits, according to their capacities, like itself, holy and pure, enlightening our

minds, informing our judgments, rectifying our wills, regulating our affections, directing our consciences, and so reducing all the powers and faculties of our souls into their proper frame and temper again. Hence St. Peter, speaking to all true Christians, saith, *seeing you have purified your souls, in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently*, 1 Pet. i. 22. where, as he supposeth that they had pure hearts, so he shews how they came by them, even by the Spirit bestowed upon them, in hearing and obeying the truth revealed in the Gospel of Christ, whose Spirit it is, and who always gives it to those who truly believe in him; for they are all real members of that body whereof he is head, and therefore must needs be acted by the same Spirit that is in him. And hence it is, that Christ is said to *dwell in our hearts by faith*, Eph. iii. 17 because his Spirit doth so. Hence also it is, that St. Peter saith, that God *purifies our hearts by faith*, Acts xv. 9. and Christ himself saith, that we are *sanctified by faith that is in him*, Acts xxvi. 18. because upon our believing in him, he diffuseth that measure of his grace and holy Spirit into us, whereby our hearts are purified and made holy

And this certainly is the only way whereby it is possible for our hearts ever to be made pure; for though our human nature in general was purified by being united to the divine person, our human persons in particular can never be purified, but by partaking of the divine nature; which we can never do any other way, but only by believing and trusting in that divine person to which our nature is united, even Christ Jesus. But if we do that as we ought, he will make us partakers of his divine nature, by giving us that divine Spirit which proceeds from him, and is of the same divine nature with himself, and therefore is able to make us so too. Neither is he less willing than able to do it; for being sent by Christ, he presently exerts his divine

power and grace upon our hearts, making them as sincerely pure and holy, as the heart of lapsed creatures can be made. And what is still wanting in them to make them perfectly pure, Christ himself supplies by his own all-sufficient merits. So that by this means we may all become such as our Saviour here calls *pure in heart*, and, by consequence, so blessed as to see God.

But see God ! who can do that ? Doth not St. John say, that *no man hath seen God at any time* ? John i. 18. 1 John iv. 12. doth not St. Paul say, that *God dwelleth in that light which no mortal eye can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see* ? 1 Tim. vi. 16. doth not God himself say to Moses, *thou canst not see my face : for there is no man shall see me and live* ? Exod. xxxiii. 20. It is true, no man ever did or can see God at all with his bodily eye, nor perfectly with the eye of his soul, so long as it is in this mortal body. But it is as true also what the same St. Paul saith, that we shall hereafter see him *face to face*, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. and what the same St. John saith, that *we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*, 1 John iii. 2. but then he adds, that *every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure*, ver. 3. whereas he proves that we shall be like God, because we shall see him, which none can do who is not like him, so he shews wherein we must be like God, that we may see him, even in being *pure as he is pure* : according to what our Saviour himself here saith, that *the pure in heart shall see God*.

But what it is to see God, and how the *pure in heart* shall do it, are questions not so easily to be determined. Howsoever, by the assistance of God, I shall offer at something towards it : not that I think it possible for me to express myself about it, so as that all should understand my meaning ; for it is plain, that none can rightly apprehend what it is to see God, but they who do see him, or at least have done it. And it is as plain,

that none ever did or can see him, but only they who are *pure in heart*; to whom our Lord himself here appropriates this great blessedness, and so excludes all others from it. And, by consequence, after all that can be said concerning it, they whose minds are infected with heresy, corrupted with vice, or destitute of true grace and virtue, will still be in the dark about it, hearing only a sound of words in their ears, but knowing nothing of what they mean, no more than a man that is born blind understands a discourse of colours, and the difference between one and another; who, whatsoever is said about them, he having never seen any such thing, cannot possibly frame any idea of them in his mind. This the apostle long ago observed, saying, *that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*, 1 Cor. ii. 14. that is, he who is still in his natural unregenerate estate, no better than he was first born, or perhaps much worse, such a one is not capable of spiritual things, he cannot receive them in the love of them, for they do not seem to him, as they are in themselves, the height of wisdom, but mere foolishness and babbling, (as the great Athenian philosophers esteemed them, Acts xvii. 18.) neither can he know them, or have any clear or right apprehensions of them, because they being purely spiritual, can be discerned only in a spiritual manner, which he being altogether carnal and sensual, is not qualified for. And if impure and corrupt minds are not able to discern any thing at all that is purely spiritual, much less can they see him that is spirit and purity itself.

When I seriously consider this, I cannot wonder there are any in the world who deny or doubt of God's existence; I rather wonder there are not more; for seeing all men are born and live in sin, and so have their foolish hearts darkened, not only by their original, but likewise by many actual transgressions, it is very

much that there are so few but who have some sense and notions of a Deity : and they who have not, must ascribe it wholly to the pravity and corruption of their nature, which makes them incapable of seeing him, who is purity and perfection itself : for this is that into which the Holy Ghost himself resolves the origin of all atheism ; *The fool*, saith he, *hath said in his heart, There is no God* ; and then gives this as the reason of it, *corrupt are they, and have done abominable works ; there is none that doth good. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy*, Psal. xiv. 1, 3. they are altogether become filthy, that is the reason that they are so far from seeing God, that they cannot see so much as that there is a God, and therefore say, at least in their corrupt and filthy hearts, there is none.

But what if there be here and there a man so stark-blind, that he cannot see the sun shining at noon-day, may we thence conclude, that there is no such thing as a sun in the firmament, or that it never shines ? or that all the rest of mankind are mistaken, who see both it, and all things else by it, every day ? The case is the same here ; there may, perhaps, be some few persons upon earth, who by giving way to their unruly passions, by their frequent debaucheries, and all sorts of lewd practices, have so corrupted and vitiated their minds, that they cannot discern that pure and all-glorious light, which we call God ; but although it shines continually so as to dazzle the eyes of all others about them, yet they notwithstanding are still in the dark, living as without God in the world. But because such men cannot see God, doth it thence follow that there is none to see ? or that no other people can see him, because they do not ? no surely ; though all mankind be very much depraved and out of tune, there are very few but who have so much sense left them, as still to perceive that God is. This all men do by the very light of nature, except those few who have quite extinguished it, and so are monsters rather than men : but none can rightly

conceive and apprehend what God is, but only they whose hearts are purged and freed from that filth and corruption that hinders their sight of him, and are restored to their primitive holiness and purity, *without which*, as the apostle saith, *no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14. but that the pure in heart shall see God, God himself here positively asserteth with his own mouth.

They shall see God, that is, they shall see Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, the Being of all beings, the cause of all causes, the best of all goods, the principal of all motion, the fountain of all light, the centre of all happiness, the perfection of all perfections. They shall see God, the sole Creator, the continual Preserver, the universal Governor of the world, who made all things by the power of his word, who upholdeth all things by the word of his power, and who orders all things according to his own good will and pleasure. They shall see him, before whom *the nations are as a drop of the bucket, and are accounted as the small dust of the balance : who taketh up the isles as a very little thing : him before whom all nations are as nothing, and are accounted as less than nothing and vanity : him who sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers : who stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in*, Isa. xl. 15, 17, 22. they shall see him, whose name is *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty*, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. they shall see him who is *Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending ; which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty*, Apoc. i. 8. They shall see him, whose very essence is wisdom, and knowledge, and power, and justice, and love, and mercy, and goodness, and truth, and majesty, and eternity, and glory, and all perfections to-

gether. In short, they shall see him by whom alone they see, in whom alone they live, and move, and have their being.

This is that God, whom the pure in heart shall see both in this world, and that which is to come : even in this world, they see God, with the eye, not of their bodies, but minds, by having right and clear apprehensions of him, and a quick and lively faith in him, which, as the apostle saith, *is the evidence of things not seen*, Heb. xi. 1. and by which Moses is therefore said to have seen him that *is invisible*, Heb. xi. 27. and so do all that are pure in heart see God, by the same faith whereby their hearts are made pure ; for by it they are as fully assured of whatsoever is revealed concerning God in Scripture, as if they saw it before their eyes : as sensible of his divine nature and properties, as they are of their own weakness and imperfections : and as certain that he is, as that they themselves are, and that he is every where as certainly as they are any where : so that the same faith which purifies their hearts, possesseth them likewise with as deep a sense, and as clear a sight of God, as they can possibly have of any thing in the world besides : much more when, being fixed on Christ, it is excited and actuated by that holy Spirit, which flows from him into the hearts of all true believers ; who by this means see God by himself, by the assistance of his own Spirit, which *searcheth all things, yea, even the deep things of God*, 1 Cor. ii. 10. and revealeth them to those who love him with a pure heart, according to that remarkable promise of God our Saviour, saying, *He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto you*, John xiv. 21. and they to whom God is pleased to manifest himself must needs see him ; and they must needs see him also the same way whereby he is pleased to manifest himself, even by his holy Spirit, and, by consequence, as clearly as we see the sun by its own light. Hence David, speaking unto God, saith, *in thy light*

we shall see light, Psal. xxxvi. 9. implying, that we see God, who is light itself, by that light which proceeds from himself, even by his own Spirit, enlightening our minds at the same time that he purifies our hearts : and so giving us as full a sight of God, as our nature at present is capable of.

By this means, therefore, they who are pure in heart see God : they see him in his holy word, wherein he reveals his will, and unveils himself and his perfections to them : they see him in his works, wherein he shineth forth in all his glory before them : they see his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness in his creation, preservation, and government of the world : they see his infinite justice in the condemnation of the fallen angels : they see his infinite justice and mercy both together in the redemption of fallen man : they see him, being in every thing that is, working in every thing that moves, and ordering every thing that happens in the world : they see him smiling upon all the glorified spirits in heaven, frowning upon the damned in hell, directing the courses of all the stars in the firmament, upholding, governing, and disposing of all the fowls in the air, all the fishes in the sea, and all the men, and beasts, and insects upon the land : they see him giving bounds to the waters, fruitfulness to the earth, and their respective virtues and qualities to all the herbs, and plants, and stones, and metals, and minerals that are in either : they see him in themselves, wheresoever they are ; they look upon him as present with them : whatsoever they have, they look upon him as bestowing it upon them ; whatsoever they do, they look upon him as assisting them in it : above all, they see him in the purity of their own hearts ; as Gregory Nyssen observes, saying, *that he who hath purged his heart from all corrupt affection*, ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τῆς θείας φύσεως καθορᾷ εἰκόνα, *seeth the image of the divine nature in his own beauty, or purity*, Greg. Nyss. de Beatitud. Orat. 6. For the nature of God being purity itself, they who are pure in heart are so far like to God ;

and *partakers of the divine nature*, as St. Peter speaks, 2 Pet. i. 4. and therefore, if they do but look into their own hearts, so much as they see of purity, so much they see of God himself there, whose image and likeness it is.

But here we must observe, that the sight which such persons have of God, is not a bare simple intuition or very speculation, which is common to others as well as to them: for they that have a clear head, although their heart be impure, they may notwithstanding have high and excellent notions of God, and discourse elegantly of his divine nature and properties, his word and works, and how we may see him, and his glory in them, and yet all this while have no sense at all of what they speak upon their own hearts; for such notions only swim in the brain, and flow from thence into the tongue: they never come near the heart, nor affect that at all, by reason of its impurity and hardness, which makes it insensible of every thing that is truly good and pure, howsoever it may be set off and adorned: and in them is verified that of the prophet, that *seeing they shall see and shall not perceive*, Isa. vi. 9. Matt. xiii. 14. and the reason he gives is, because their hearts are waxed gross and fat, stuffed up with so much filth, that they have no seeing in them, nor relish what they see, any more than as if they did not see it at all.

But it is not so with the *pure in heart*; they see God in their heart as well as in their heads. At the same time they see, they likewise taste, that the Lord is good and gracious, as the Holy Ghost himself speaks, Psal. xxxiv. 8. 1 Pet. ii. 3. for their hearts being pure, and so like to God, every glance of him goes to the very bottom of them, and overspreads them with such a sense of his glory and goodness, as moves and inclines all the powers and faculties of their souls towards him. This I do not question but many here present have found by their own experience, who, when they have been thinking upon God, have felt themselves struck, as it were,

with an holy admiration of him, and their hearts all in a flame with love, desire, and joy, and a great deal more than I am able to express, or they themselves either. So that they seem to see God, not only with the eye of their reason, or understanding, but with their whole hearts, and their whole souls, all their faculties being equally affected, one as well as another; at least so far as they are clean and pure, but no farther: and that is the reason why this sight of God is rare in any, and so imperfect in the best that are upon earth, because there are so few that are sincerely pure, and none that are perfectly so, while they are in the body. But when we come to heaven, where our souls shall be made the spirits of *just men made perfect*, there we shall see God perfectly, and so be perfectly filled with all manner of joy and satisfaction in him, as much as our most pure and perfect souls can hold. And then we shall perfectly find, by our own experience, how true our Lord is in what he promises, as well as asserts, saying, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

For they shall see God! that is the reason which he himself here gives, why the pure in heart are blessed. Indeed, seeing he, who is the fountain of all blessing, hath pronounced them to be so, we could not but acknowledge them to be blessed, although he had given us no other reason for it. Yet, howsoever, he hath given us here such a reason for it, that we cannot but from thence conclude them to be blessed, although he had never pronounced them to be so: for all the real blessedness that we are capable of, consisteth in our enjoyment of him that made us, and who made us of such a temper, that we cannot possibly be happy in any thing but himself, and therefore hath made nothing to make us happy, intending himself alone and his perfections for the object of our felicity: but as we can never be happy but in the enjoyment of God, the chiefest and only good, so we can never enjoy him unless we see

him ; neither can we see him, but we shall enjoy him ; for we enjoy him by our seeing of him ; as we may plainly discover by our very senses. The palate enjoys what it tastes, the ear what it hears, the eye what it sees, and so of the rest. Neither can we enjoy any sensible objects any other way, but by our senses being severally affected by them. So here, God is the proper object of our souls ; and therefore so much as we see, so much we must needs enjoy of him : our whole souls, as I observed before, being affected with that blessed sight. From whence it necessarily follows, that the pure in heart must needs be blessed, in that they see God. And so far as they see God, so far they are blessed, even in this life.

They are blessed in all places, for they see God still present with them, upholding them in their being, supplying their wants, and protecting them from danger and mischief : they are blessed in all their enjoyments ; for they see God both giving, and continuing, and sanctifying them all unto them : they are blessed in all their religious duties, for they see God exciting them to them, assisting of them, and declaring himself as well-pleased with them, and accepting of them for Christ Jesus's sake : they are blessed in all their civil actions, for they see God ordering their thoughts, directing their intentions, strengthening their resolutions, and co-operating all along in their performance of them : they are blessed in all conditions, for they see God managing the chain of all inferior causes, so as to make them all work together for their good : they see him winding and turning every thing that happens to them, till at last it turn to their real profit and advantage ; and therefore, whatsoever their condition be, they are not only satisfied but well-pleased with it, as seeing it to be the best they could be in at that time : they may meet with troubles and crosses in the world, as other men do, but they are not so to them ; for they see to both ends of them, from whence

they come, and whither they tend, and therefore are never troubled or disturbed at them; but in the midst of all the changes and chances of this mortal life, they are still the same; for as they always see God, they always trust on him, and rejoice in him, and strive all they can to please him, and to approve themselves unto him. And so long as they can do that, whatsoever storms or tempests may be without, they have still tranquillity and peace within: and how great a blessedness that is, none can tell but they that have it, even they who being pure in heart, always see God: they have it in a great measure upon earth, and when they come to heaven, they will have it in its utmost extremity and perfection; for there, as their hearts will be perfectly pure, they will see God perfectly, and so be perfectly blessed for ever.

And as all the pure in heart will be thus blessed, so none but they can be so; as David also intimates, saying, *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? he that hath clean hands and a pure heart*, Psal. xxiv. 3, 4. Heaven is an high and holy place, where the air is so thin and pure, that no foul or impure creatures can live, much less enjoy any pleasure in it: they cannot get thither if they would, and if they were there, they would soon wish to be out again, as finding nothing to please and gratify their corrupt humours, nothing but what is contrary to their temper and inclinations: insomuch, that heaven would seem more like hell than heaven to them: the company that is there would seem irksome, the work tedious, and the very joys would be a trouble to them. But they need not fear that they shall ever be troubled with them; for they, going out of this world with unclean hearts, will be immediately sent to a place and company that is more proper for them, even to live with unclean spirits in the region of darkness for ever.

Wherefore, as ever we desire *to be meet to be par-*

takers of the inheritance with the saints in light, we must be sure to depart out of this life with clean hands, and a pure heart, that so the air of that place may agree with us, and our minds may be duly qualified and disposed to taste and relish those pure and spiritual entertainments, which Christ hath purchased at no less a price than with his own blood, and is now providing for us, out of the inexhaustible treasure of his own infinite goodness and bounty, in the highest heavens, where we shall always live with him and see his glory, and continually admire, adore, magnify, and enjoy all those glorious, infinite, incomprehensible, and eternal perfections, that are concentrated in his divine nature. And then we shall fully understand how blessed a thing it is to see God, and how the pure in heart shall do it for ever.

Which therefore that we may all do, let us make it our constant care and study to get and keep our hearts always clean and pure. And seeing we can never do it without the assistance of God's holy Spirit, let us earnestly pray to God with David, that he would *create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us* : and with our church, that he would *cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his holy Spirit*. And seeing some hearts are like those unclean spirits, which, our Saviour saith, *will not go out but by prayer and fasting*, let us often join fasting with our prayers ; that by keeping our bodies under, we may be better able to keep our hearts free from all impure thoughts and desires, and in a right disposition to receive such illuminations and assistances of God's pure and holy Spirit, as may make them also pure and holy. For which purpose, let us also frequently read and meditate upon God's holy word, and apply ourselves to Christ, in his holy sacrament, that together with his mystical body and blood we may, by faith, receive his Spirit too. By the constant and sincere use of these means, and trusting upon God for his blessing upon

them, through the assistance of his holy Spirit moving in them, we may both get and keep our hearts pure, and so be as blessed as God himself can make us, for we shall see him : we may be confident of it, for we have Christ's own word for it, saying, *Blessed are the pure in heart, &c.*

S E R M O N CXXVI.

AGAINST RASH SWEARING.

MATT v. 34.

But I say unto you, Swear not at all.

THESE words are much to be observed, as containing the will of our heavenly Father, revealed to us not by a prophet, or apostle, or any creature, but by his only-begotten Son, who came into the world on purpose to save us ; and therefore, be sure, would require nothing of us, but what is necessary for our salvation : and being himself also truly God, of the same nature with the Father, he could not but perfectly understand what was necessary, and what was the divine will and pleasure we should do, in order thereunto. For which reason, therefore, while he was upon earth, conversing with mankind in their own likeness, he took particular care to instruct them with his own mouth in their whole duty, what they ought to believe, and what they ought to do, that they may be saved by him. And having observed that the ancient rabbins, or doctors and leaders of the Jewish church, had put false glosses and misinterpretations upon the moral law, and that the people, taking the sense of it from them, had been led into great mistakes about it, which might hinder their obtaining that eternal salvation which he designed to purchase for them with his own blood ; he therefore took all occasions of correcting those mistakes, and of ac-

quainting them with the true sense and meaning of each commandment.

Particularly, whereas it is said in the third commandment, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain ; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain*, Exod. xx. 7 and elsewhere, *Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of the Lord thy God*, Lev. xix. 12. and again, *If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth*, Numb. xxx. 2. These, and such-like laws concerning oaths and swearing, the ancient rabbins had interpreted so, as if no more was meant by them, but only that men should do whatsoever they had sworn they would do. *Again*, saith our Saviour, *ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths*, Matt. iii. 33. which false interpretation of those divine laws, was of very ill consequence ; for people having received this from their forefathers as the full sense of them, they made no conscience of swearing in their common discourse, or of taking the name of God rashly and in vain : they regarded not what, or how, or how often they swore : if they did but perform what they had sworn, they thought themselves guilty of no fault, but that they had perfectly obeyed the law, and done all that was required in it.

But our blessed Lord, who was himself the lawgiver, teacheth them another lesson, saying, in the words of my text, *But I say unto you, Swear not at all ;* as if he had said, I, who made the law, and therefore must needs know the meaning of it better than you or your forefathers ; I, who am wisdom itself, and therefore understand the full extent and latitude of every precept ; I, who am truth itself, and therefore neither will nor can deceive you ; I, who am come into the world to

direct you in the right way of serving God, and keeping his laws; I assure you, there is a great deal more in those laws about swearing, than you imagine, or have received by tradition from your ancestors; for they do not only require you not to forswear yourselves, but not to swear at all; *But I say unto you, Swear not at all.*

But it is strange to observe, that these plain and perspicuous words, which were designed to explain those of the moral law, have been as little understood, and as falsely interpreted by some, as those which they were designed to explain: for as the Jews contracted the sense of the moral commandments into so narrow a compass, as if no more was intended by them, but that men should not forswear themselves; so some that are called Christians, as Pelagians, Anabaptists, and Quakers, have extended these words of our Saviour so far, as to make them reach all manner of swearing, upon the most necessary and solemn occasions that can happen: which is every way as false and absurd as the other. And therefore, to prevent your falling into any mistakes about them, I shall first explain our Saviour's will and pleasure in them, what he doth not, and what he doth mean, by not swearing at all; and then shew how much it concerns all men carefully to observe what he here commands, saying, *But I say unto you, Swear not at all.*

By swearing, therefore, we are to understand the calling God to witness the truth of what is said; for that is the usual definition of an oath, or the common notion of swearing in general. To make us sociable creatures, or capable of conversing with one another, God hath given us the use of speech, or language, whereby we can express or declare our thoughts and intentions to one another, which otherwise must always have lain hid in our own breasts, and unknown to all our fellow-creatures: whereas, by this means, we may know what another thinks, only by hearing him speak, at least so far as we are sure that his heart and his tongue go

together. But that we can never be perfectly sure of, so long as men are in their imperfect state, and, as the Psalmist speaks, are *all liars*, Psal. cxvi. 11. Rom. iii. 4. for they may say one thing, and think or intend another ; and none knows whether they think as they speak, or intend to do what they promise, but only God, the searcher of hearts ; and therefore the calling of him, or naming him as witness of the truth of what we say, is the greatest assurance that we can give to one another, that we really think or intend in our hearts, what we utter with our lips : which if it be in a matter of fact, past or present, it is called an assertory oath, because we assert or affirm it to be so ; if it be about something to come, which we say we will or will not do, it is called a promissory oath ; unto which two, all sorts of oaths may be reduced.

This being premised concerning the nature of oaths in general, we must, in the next place, observe, that these words of our Saviour cannot possibly be so understood as if it was a thing in itself unlawful, and therefore, he would never have us take an oath, nor swear upon any occasion whatsoever, although lawful authority or necessity require it ; for we must not interpret one place of Scripture so as to make it contradict another. But it is plain, both from the Old and New Testament, that to swear, or call God to witness what we say, was always reckoned not only lawful, but necessary, upon some occasions : which, that I may fully convince you of, and so keep you from ever falling into the absurd and dangerous error of some in our days, who think, or at least pretend it to be unlawful to swear, or take any oath, though administered by lawful authority, in a matter also that is lawful, I desire you to consider,

First, we find Almighty God himself, the supreme Lawgiver of the world, I say, we find him often swearing, sometimes by himself, sometimes by his holiness, which is himself ; *the Lord hath sworn by his holiness,*

saith the prophet Amos, iv. 2. So, *once have I sworn by my holiness*, saith he himself, *that I will not fail David*, Psal. lxxxix. 35. And elsewhere, *I swear by myself*, saith the Lord, *that this house shall become a desolation*, Jer. xxii. 5. And upon Abraham's offering up his son Isaac, *By myself have I sworn*, saith the Lord, *for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thy only son, that in blessing I will bless thee*, Gen. xxii. 16, 17. From whence the apostle observes, that *when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself*, Heb. vi. 13. *Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath*, ver. 17. and if he sware who cannot sin, we may be confident it can be no sin to swear.

Moreover, as God himself is pleased sometimes to swear by himself, so he hath not only permitted, but commanded us to swear by his name, saying, *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name*, Deut. vi. 13. And again, *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name*, Deut. x. 20. From whence it appears, that he hath made this part of that worship and honour which we ought to pay him, and that it is as much our duty, upon occasion, to swear by his name, as it is to fear and serve him. And in those very commandments, wherein he requires us not to *take his name in vain*, and *not to swear by his name falsely*, Exod. xx. 7. Levit. xix. 12. he plainly intimates, that we may and ought to swear truly by it.

Accordingly we find the holy angels themselves swearing by him ; *And the angel*, saith St. John, *which I saw stand upon the sea, and upon the earth, lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever*, Rev. x. 5. So also Dan. xii. 7. And as for the saints in the Old Testament, there is nothing more frequently recorded of them, than their admi-

nistering and taking of oaths ; as Abraham made his steward *swear by the Lord the God of heaven, and the God of earth*, Gen. xxiv. 3. but such examples are so frequent, that I need not mention them.

But I cannot omit that which, if it be possible, is more observable, even that God himself hath given us directions how to swear, saying, *Thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness*, Jer. iv. 2. where we may observe his command to swear, in general, *Thou shalt swear* ; the form of the oath he would have taken, *The Lord liveth* ; and then the manner how he would have it taken, *in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness* ; in truth, that is, that the thing a man swears to, be true in itself, and known to be so to him that sweareth, and that he swears it truly, sincerely, heartily, without any equivocation or mental reservation, and so be not in the number of those which the same prophet speaks of, saying, *Though they say, The Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely*, Jer. v. 2.

And as you must swear in truth, so also in judgment, that is, with that caution, prudence, discretion, and reverence, as becometh those who speak of him, by whom they speak, in whom they live, and by whom their very thoughts as well as actions are weighed. And therefore, all these offend against this rule, who swear in passion, rashly, or inconsiderately ; as Herod, when he swore that he would give his wife's daughter whatsoever she asked, Matt. xiv. 7 and the princes of Israel, who swore to the Gibeonites without asking *at the mouth of the Lord*, Josh. ix. 14, 15.

And then it must be done also in righteousness, that is, the matter of the oath must be lawful and just, agreeable to God's holy word, or, at least, no way contrary to it, as David's was, when he swore he would *destroy all that pertained to Nabal*, 1 Sam. xxv. 22. and what is thus sworn, must be righteously and faithfully performed, otherways it cannot be said to be sworn in righteousness : and therefore the prophet inveighs against those

which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness, Isa. xlviii. 1. because they did not take care to act accordingly. These are the rules which God himself hath prescribed to be diligently observed in every oath that a man takes; and therefore, he that takes an oath according to these rules, may be confident he doth not sin, for he acts according to God's own directions, who never teaches men how to sin, but how to do that which is lawful and right in his eyes. And therefore, he having directed us how to swear, he hath thereby given us an undeniable argument that we may lawfully do it, so that we do but observe his directions in it. And hence it is said, that every one who thus *swaureth by the Lord shall glory*, or be commended, *but the mouth of them that speak lies*, or swear falsely, *shall be stopped*, Psal. lxiii. 11. and *he that swaureth to his own hurt, and changeth not*, is reckoned among those who shall *abide in the tabernacle of God, and dwell in his holy hill*, Psal. xv. 4.

Neither hath God only given us these directions about swearing, but he gave power also to judges and magistrates to administer an oath in doubtful cases; as if there be a controversy between two neighbours, concerning *an ox or sheep, the oath of the Lord shall be between them*, and by that the judges shall determine the cause, Exod. xxii. 10, 11. And in the case of jealousy, *the priest shall charge the woman with an oath*, Numb. v. 19. Thus Abimelech made Abraham swear to be true to him, Gen. xxiv. 23. Abraham made his servant swear, that he would *not take a wife to his son Isaac of the daughters of Canaan*, Gen. xxiv. 3. Jacob made Joseph swear that he would not bury him in Egypt, but amongst his forefathers, Gen. xlvii. 30, 31. Many such examples there are all over the Old Testament, which plainly shew, that the saints of God in those days, made no scruple at all of giving or taking oaths, but looked upon it as their duty in some cases to do it.

The same may be said also of those in the New Testament, especially St. Paul, who perfectly understood the mind of God and of our Saviour in my text, and yet often swears, or calls God to witness the truth of what he said, and that too when he was inspired with the infallible Spirit of God himself, in writing his mind and will ; as where he saith, *for God is my witness, whom I serve, with my Spirit in the Gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers*, Rom. i. 9. and elsewhere, *moreover, I call God to record upon my soul, that to spare you, I came not as yet to Corinth*, 2 Cor. i. 23. and again, *now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not*, Gal. i. 20. which are all as plain and solemn oaths as any man can take ; and therefore he that presumes to say it is unlawful to take an oath, doth not only condemn St. Paul, but he blasphemes that holy Spirit, by which he spake, when he took those oaths ; and how great a sin that is, let them look to it, who are guilty of such horrid presumption.

To all which I shall only add, that the same St. Paul, who, doubtless, wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, though his name be not put to it, he, I say, expressly says, *for men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife*, Heb. vi. 16. where he doth not only approve of taking oaths or swearing upon lawful occasions, but acquaints us also with the great end and necessary use of it, even to put an end to all strife ; this being, as it is expressed in the civil law, *maximum expediendarum litium remedium*, the greatest remedy that ever was or can be found out for the determining of controversies ; for by swearing we call the greatest person in the world to vouch the truth of what we say, him who certainly knows whether we swear truly or no, and who will as certainly punish us if we do not.

And hence it is, that swearing by his name is so great a part of that worship which we owe to God, be-

cause by that we testify our acknowledgment both of his omniscience, and his supreme authority over the world ; and that is the reason why he commands us to swear by his name, and not by any other : as where Joshua, in his name, charges the people of Israel not to make mention of the name of the heathen gods, *nor cause to swear by them*, Josh. xxiii. 7. and God was so angry with them afterwards for doing it, that he saith, *How can I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods*, Jer. v. 7 where he plainly makes the swearing by any other but himself, to be downright forsaking him, because, by that, men give that honour unto others which is due only to the true God, and so set them up for gods, by swearing by their names : from whence it appears, that it is so far from being unlawful, that it is a necessary duty to swear by the true God, and by him only.

And this, as I might easily shew, hath been the constant sense and practice of the church of Christ in all ages ; but unless men be resolved to contradict the holy Scriptures themselves, rather than their own humours and fancies, the many plain undeniable proofs and instances that I have now produced out of the Old and New Testament, must needs be sufficient to convince them, that swearing by the name of God is not in itself a sin, but a duty, that we both may and ought to take an oath, when it is administered to us by lawful authority, as in courts of judicatory, for the deciding of controversies betwixt man and man, and upon such-like weighty occasions ; and, by consequence, that these words of our blessed Saviour, *Swear not at all*, cannot possibly be so understood, as if he would never have us take an oath upon any occasion whatsoever ; for this would be a plain contradiction to the law and the prophets, which he himself, in this very chapter, saith he came not to destroy, but to fulfil, Matt. v. 17 and so this would make him contradict himself ; which let

them have a care of, who put such a mischievous and absurd sense upon his sacred words.

But you will say, perhaps, what then can he mean? Doth not he say in plain terms, *Swear not at all*? he doth so; and if we take his words singly by themselves, without considering what goes before or follows after them, there might be some colour for such an exposition, if the rest of the Scriptures would allow of it. But this is not the way of finding out the true sense of holy Scripture, or any other writing: for where several words are put together to signify an author's mind, you must not take it from some of them without the rest, but from all together as he expressed it; otherwise you do not take his sense from the words, but put your own upon them: the not observing whereof hath been the occasion of most of the heresies and errors that have disturbed the church. Indeed, there is nothing so absurd or ridiculous but may be extorted from some place of Scripture or other, if you take the words apart by themselves, without considering the scope and design of the place: but if you do that, as all must do that would interpret the Scriptures aright, the sense will then be plain and easy.

As in this very place, these words, *swear not at all*, are not a proposition of themselves, but part of our Saviour's divine discourse concerning oaths, or swearing, as it was then used by the Jews. And if we cast our eye upon the whole discourse, and look upon it all together, we shall clearly see that our Saviour is not here speaking of taking oaths before a magistrate, or upon any public and solemn occasion, but of swearing in our common discourse and conversation with one another: and that is plainly the swearing which he forbids; as appears,

First, from the occasion of these words in the verse before my text; *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thy vows*: where he

plainly speaks of promissory oaths, which a man is bound afterwards to perform : but such oaths are never taken in courts of justice for the deciding of controversies, but only between man and man.

The same appears also from what follows, *Swear not at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool, &c.* For the understanding of which, we must know, that the Jews were permitted to swear by the name of God only before their magistrates : but by their false interpreters of Scripture, they were allowed in their common discourse to swear by any thing else, as by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem, by their head, or the like. But our Saviour here makes no mention of their swearing by the name of God, but only by other things ; which plainly sheweth, that he doth not meddle here with their taking oaths before their magistrates in the name of God himself, but only with their swearing by other things : which seeing they never did, but only in their common discourse, his words must be understood only of such swearing as they commonly used betwixt one another : which they did not look upon as unlawful, or binding, because the name of God was not used in it ; as might easily be shewn, not only out of the Talmud, and other Jewish writers, but from Philo himself, who lived about our Saviour's time, and delivers the sense and practice of the Jews in this matter.

This therefore is that which our Saviour here forbids, and gives us the reason why he doth so ; even because he that swears by heaven, or by earth, or any such thing, he doth, in effect, swear by God himself : *Swear not at all*, saith he, *neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool ; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King ; neither shalt thou swear by the head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black :* as if he had said, Heaven is God's throne, earth his footstool, Jerusalem his city, thy head his workmanship ; for none but he

can make so much as one hair white or black: and therefore he that sweareth by these things, swears, in effect, by God himself; for, as he himself saith in another place, *whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein; and he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon*, Matt. xxiii. 21, 22. And therefore the swearing by such things ought to be as much avoided, as swearing by the name of God himself, in whom it terminates. And this is that which St. James also means, where he saith, *But above all things, my brethren, swear not at all; neither by heaven, neither by earth, neither by any other oath*, James v. 12. that is, use no kind of oaths whatsoever in your common discourse; for they are all sinful, when so commonly and rashly used, one as well as another

But to put it beyond all doubt, that our Lord speaks here only of common swearing, he himself is pleased to tell us so with his own mouth, saying, *But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay*, ver. 37 that is, let your ordinary discourse, or speech, as the word signifies, whereby you converse and commune together, let it be pure and simple; let it not be corrupted with oaths or curses, but only affirming what you think to be true, or denying what you think to be false, without intermingling any sort of oaths with your words, or confirming what you say by swearing it is, or it is not so; *for whatsoever is more than these*, saith he, *cometh of evil*; it proceeds from an evil mind, it produceth an evil custom, it is of an evil example, and tends to an evil end; and so it comes from the evil one, the devil himself, who, as he is the father of lies, so he is the father too of all profane swearing and cursing, which usually go together; cursing being indeed but one sort of swearing, and one of the worse sorts too, if one may be said to be worse than another, when all are as bad as bad can be.

By this time, I hope, you all perceive your Saviour's

mind and meaning in these words, wherein he commands you not to swear at all in your ordinary conversation and discoursing with one another : and this is that command which I must now advise and beseech you all carefully to observe. I hope the far greatest part of the congregation do already abominate this horrid sin of common and profane swearing, and so need not any arguments to dissuade them from it. But I fear that some of you are too much guilty of it : and there are none of you but may be sometimes liable to fall into it, by the prevalence of the devil's temptations, or of your own passions, or perhaps by your too easy and sinful compliance with the company you keep ; there being many, with whom you may sometimes have occasion to converse, so horribly addicted to this vice, that they cannot speak without an oath ; and are so far from observing this command, *Swear not at all*, that they always swear, whensoever they discourse upon any subject, though never so trifling and impertinent ; and all vice being infectious to our corrupt nature, they who keep company with such profane wretches, are apt in a short time to become such themselves. There are many, too many instances to be found of this kind ; and therefore it will be necessary to arm you, as much as possible, against this damnable sin, which is grown so common in this city, and the whole land, that, unless it be prevented by a timely repentance, we have just cause to fear some extraordinary judgment will be inflicted upon us for it.

For which purpose, therefore, I desire you first to consider, that you are all Christians, and hope to be saved by Christ ; and therefore, one would think, that you need not any other arguments to persuade you not to swear, than that Christ himself hath said, *Swear not at all*. Christ, who loved you, and gave himself for you ; Christ, whom you profess to love and honour above all the persons in the world ; Christ, who said, *If ye love me, keep my commandments*, he hath commanded

you not to swear : and if ye will not keep this commandment, which of all his commandments can ye keep ? None certainly. This is so plain, so cheap, so easy a commandment, that there is scarce another like it in all the Bible ; for it is only not to swear, not to do that which only will undo you, without affording you either pleasure, or profit, or honour, or any thing that ye can so much as pretend to be a temptation to it : insomuch that I have sometimes wondered with myself, what should be the reason that this sin is so common in the world ; and, after all my search, can find out but this one, which is, that men will commit this sin, because it is a sin. If God had never forbid you to swear, or had commanded you to do it, you would have been as backward to it, as ye are to praying or praising his name : but seeing he hath charged you not to swear, although there is nothing else can tempt you to it, yet you will do it ; you will therefore do it, because God would not have you. O dreadful impiety ! who can think of it without horror and amazement ? that ever mankind should be so corrupted ! that men should fly in the very face of heaven, and offend God only that they may offend him ! And yet this is the case of every common swearer : and therefore if any of you be such, do not look upon yourselves any longer as Christians, until you leave it off ; nor of the communion of saints, but of the society of those wicked spirits, who sin for sin's sake. Be sure, ye are far from being Christians ; for Christians are such as believe in Christ. But how can you so much as profess to believe in Christ, when you will not do any one thing that he bids you ? And if you will not do this, if you will not so much as leave swearing, in obedience to him, ye may be confident that you obey him in nothing, but live in the constant transgression of all his laws. And with what confidence then can you expect to be saved by him ? No, mistake not yourselves, he is the *author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him*, and to none else, Heb. v. 9. And therefore, as ever you desire

that Christ should stand your friend and save you ; as ever you desire that God would have mercy upon you for his sake, for his sake *swear not at all* : or, if you will not leave off this sin for Christ's sake, at least do it for your own sakes. If ye do not care whether he save you or no, however be not so foolish as to condemn yourselves ; as you plainly do, by every oath you swear in common discourse : you condemn yourselves for a company of perfidious and lying wretches, that no man can believe one word you say, except you swear to it ; except you bring a voucher, and the greatest too in the world, to attest the truth of what you say. Doth not this plainly argue, that you are conscious to yourselves of great hypocrisy and deceit ? Doth it not clearly shew, that you have forfeited all your credit and reputation in the world, so that you cannot be trusted or be believed without an oath ? for otherwise, what need you swear ? would not men believe you without an oath, if they took you for honest and good men ? yes, surely, far better than with it : for, after all, your swearing to it is so far from gaining any credit to what you say, that it utterly destroys it ; for it is a most certain truth, that he that will swear, will lie : he that makes no conscience of offending God, will make none of deceiving me. And therefore if we hear a man swear, we have no ground to believe one word he saith, upon that very account, because he swears to it : but rather, we have reason to suspect every thing he saith to be false, in that by his swearing he discovers himself to be a man of no conscience ; and therefore, one that matters not how much he imposeth upon us. So that whatsoever some may think, this is certainly one of the most foolish, ridiculous, and absurd vices that a man can be guilty of ; and which many of the heathens themselves frequently inveighed against, and looked upon it as a most horrid sin, to swear even by their false gods.

But what a sin then must it be to swear vainly and rashly by the true God, the great, the Almighty God,

that made and governs the whole world? far greater, doubtless, than can be described. The mere speaking of him, or taking his sacred name into our mouth in vain, and to no purpose, is a great sin, expressly forbidden in the third commandment; how much more the common swearing by it, and calling upon him to attest the truth of what we say, upon every slight occasion? It is true, all sins are committed against the laws of God, and so against his authority and power. But this is committed against his name, his person itself: it is downright affronting his divine Majesty to his face. Would a prince take it well, if his subjects should call him, upon all occasions, to witness what they talk among themselves? would he bear with such insolency? or suffer such contempt to be thrown continually upon him? yet a prince and his subjects are fellow-creatures: but for creatures to do this to their almighty Creator, for dust and ashes to call the Sovereign of the world to vouch their impertinent talk and chat, is such a piece of impudence and presumption, that did we not see it too frequently done, one would think it impossible that any mortal should dare to do it, that they should dare to take his sacred name into their polluted lips, which he hath so expressly commanded all men to fear and dread, *that thou mayest fear, saith he, this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God,* Deut. xxviii. 58. How far are all they from this holy fear, who presume, upon all occasions, to profane this glorious name! how plainly do they shew, that they have no fear of God before their eyes' so plainly, that it is no breach of Christian charity to say they have not; for if they had, they would be so far from taking his holy name in vain, that they would never dare to speak of him without fear and reverence; for their speaking of him would always call his greatness and glory to their minds. And who is able to think of so great and glorious a Being, without reverence and godly fear? and who then can fear him, and not fear the taking his name

in vain ? Hence Solomon makes this the great difference betwixt a wicked and a good man, that the one *swareth*, and the other *feareth an oath*, Eccles. ix. 2. A good man that fears God, fears the profaning of his holy name by oaths ; but he that swears is a wicked man, therefore wicked, because he swears ; wicked in the highest degree of wickedness : how should this make all men dread the thoughts of this horrid sin, which so plainly demonstrates them to be in the *gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity* ?

Especially, considering that this is not only a great sin of itself, but it is usually accompanied with others as great, and, if it be possible, greater than itself ; for they that commonly swear, commonly curse too ; and that both themselves and others : what dreadful curses do such foul-mouthed wretches usually denounce against their neighbours ? Such as are not to be so much as named among Christians : and yet they will bestow them as liberally upon themselves too, as well as others ; cursing and damning themselves (I dread to speak it) to the very pit of hell ; as if they wished to be there before their time. I dare not so much as suppose there are any such among you : but if there be, I must tell them they need not take so much pains to curse and damn themselves, for God himself ere long will do it for them. Nay, he hath begun to do it already, in that he hath given them over to the power of the devil, who will be sure to hold them fast, till he hath gotten them into his own kingdom of darkness, where they will meet with all the bitter imprecations that ever came out of their mouths, and feel them for ever. This they will find to be one dismal effect of their taking God's name in vain.

And besides, they that swear often, often forswear themselves, much oftener, perhaps, than they themselves think of : for the custom of this sin makes it so natural and familiar to them, that they do not know when they commit it ; but if ye tell them of it, will

swear they did not swear. And not always knowing what or when they swear, they must needs frequently swear to that which is false, and as frequently omit the doing what they swear they will, and so forswear themselves, and be guilty of perjury in the sight of God.

And it is well if there be not blasphemy in it too. Be sure their calling God, as they commonly do, to witness that which is false, is a plain contradiction either to his omniscience or truth : for it is as much as to say, that he doth not know it to be false, or if he doth, will nevertheless attest the truth of it : which cannot be judged less than downright blasphemy.

And what dreadful punishments then must common swearers be obnoxious to ? such as it would make one's ear to tingle, and one's heart to tremble, to hear or think of them. God himself hath told them with his own mouth, and hath given it under his hand too in the third commandment, written with his own finger, that *he will not hold them guiltless* ; that is, he will be sure to punish them, one time or other, severely for it. He may suffer them to go on for a while in profaning his sacred name, until they have filled up the measure of their iniquities, and then he will shower down his judgments, in full proportion to their sins, until they utterly are destroyed. They have his own word for it, who cannot lie, and therefore they may believe it : and whether they now believe it or no, they shall one day feel it, whether they will or no ; for God will not be mocked, much less will he suffer his sacred name to be profaned by his own creatures, without making them know what it is to provoke and dishonour him that made them.

Hark what God himself saith, by his angel, to the prophet Zechariah : the prophet in a vision had seen a flying roll, *and the angel said to him, What seest thou ?* he answered, *A flying roll ; the length thereof twenty cubits, the breadth thereof ten cubits.* Then said the angel to him, *This is the curse that goeth forth over the*

face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name. And it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof, Zech. v. 2, 3, 4. Behold here a roll, or book rolled up, a great roll, twenty cubits long and ten broad, all full of curses on both sides; behold this roll flying swiftly about over the face of the whole earth; and behold it lighting at last upon every one that steal-eth, and upon every one that sweareth, none escaping, that either rob their neighbours of their goods, or God of his honour, by taking his name in vain. Behold it lighting upon his house, and there remaining till it hath consumed both him and it, to the very timber and stones: whereby is signified God's determinate counsel and purpose, not to suffer false or common swearers to go unpunished; the roll will meet with them, the curse will light upon them one time or other, and destroy them root and branch.

Neither doth this sin destroy only particular persons and families, but whole nations; *because of swearing the land mourneth*, saith the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xxiii. 10. and this is one of those sins for which God had a controversy with his own people, the inhabitants of the land of Judea, and for which he saith, *the land shall mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish*, Hos. iv. 1, 2, 3. God grant that this be not fulfilled upon our land, wherein this sin hath been, and, I fear, still is, as common as ever it was in Judea. It is true, the nation in general hath forbidden it, and enacted a law against it, and therefore I hope that God of his infinite mercy will not impute it to the whole nation, nor reckon it a national sin: but if the people

of the nation do, notwithstanding the laws both of God and man, continue in it, some severe judgment will certainly fall upon them for it; at least, upon those who are guilty of it.

But I hope none of you are so: and if any of you be, give me leave to deal plainly with you; you have now heard that Christ himself hath commanded you not to swear at all: and it is not long but you must stand before his tribunal, where you must give an account how ye have observed this, as well as any other of his commands. Now, what will you plead for yourselves, what can you say in excuse for this sin? Will you say, that you did not know it was a sin? That you cannot; for I dare say ye knew it before, and have now heard it again to be so. Will you say, that ye were tempted to it? That ye cannot; for there can be no temptation to this, of all sins, but from your own wicked and corrupt hearts. Will you say, that ye were so accustomed to it that ye could not leave it? That you cannot; for you may as easily lay down as take up an ill custom if ye will. And besides, this will be so far from excusing, that it will highly aggravate your crime, as shewing, that you had committed it so often, that it was grown into custom and habit with you. What then will ye do? Nothing certainly but expect your sad and irrevocable doom from the Judge of the whole world, who hath told you beforehand what ye must expect: *But I say unto you, saith he, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof at the day of judgment; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned, Matt. xii. 36, 37.* And if we must give an account for every idle word, what a dreadful account must you give for all your swearing and cursing. If men shall be justified by their words, how can you be justified by yours, so expressly contrary to the laws of God? If men shall be condemned for their words, you certainly, of all men,

can expect nothing but to be condemned for yours to everlasting shame and confusion. This St. James puts you in mind of, where he requires you above all things not to swear at all, *lest ye fall into condemnation*, Jam. v. 12. for so ye will all do, except ye repent, and leave off this sin before it be too late. Ye may please yourselves, if you think good, at present with it; but know this, that God, ere long, will bring you into judgment for it, and there pronounce that righteous sentence upon you, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*, Matt. xxv. 41.

Consider these things, all ye that have hitherto been any way addicted to this heinous vice, and tell me whether it doth not behove and concern you to break it off immediately by an hearty and sincere repentance? I say, immediately, lest otherwise ye may happen to die first, and so perish for ever. Wherefore let me advise and beseech you all, as ye either fear God, or love your own souls, to do it now; now that ye have heard how odious and abominable it is before God and man; now do ye begin to abominate and hate it so, as stedfastly to resolve, by God's assistance, never to commit it any more. And, for that purpose, keep these words of your blessed Saviour, *I say unto you, Swear not at all*; keep them always fresh in your minds and memories: and lest you should forget them, desire your friends, and relations, and acquaintance, to put you in mind of them every time they hear you so much as take the name of God in vain. And when you hear others do it, be not afraid nor ashamed to rebuke them for it: it is the greatest kindness you can shew them, and they will thank you for it another time, and God will be well-pleased with it. And if any be so proud and obstinate as to scorn reproof, and, notwithstanding all that God or man can say, will still retain and practise this execrable vice, let them be unto you as heathens and pub-

licans, keep company no longer with them, but shun and avoid them, as you would do persons infected with the plague, lest you catch it of them.

But that you may be sure never to fall into this sin hereafter, keep as far as possibly you can from it, come not near the borders of it, but run from every thing that looks like swearing ; remember the apostle's words, *abstain from all appearance of evil*, 1 Thess. v. 22. There are many words and phrases commonly used among us, of which some have made a question, whether they be oaths or no : but whether they be or no, it is your safest way to avoid them. It may be a sin to use them, but can be none not to use them. And there are words and phrases enough, whereby you may express your minds upon all occasions, besides those that look like oaths, whether they be or no. And it is as easy to accustom yourselves to those which are unquestionably lawful, as to such whose lawfulness is by many questioned : this also is most agreeable to our Saviour's will, who doth not only command you not to swear, but requires that your communication be *yea, yea, nay, nay*, ver. 37. that is, that you only affirm or deny what is said, without backing it with any thing like an oath ; that so every thing you speak may be, at least, harmless and innocent ; and, if possible, useful too ; according to that excellent rule laid down by the apostle, *let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may administer grace unto the hearers*, Eph. v. 29.

But after all, that ye may never have the least occasion to swear, or to confirm what ye say by oaths, ye must be sure to be always firm and constant to your promise, just and righteous in your dealings, true and faithful in all your words, so as never to tell a lie to gain the world ; and then your word will be sooner taken than another's oath, and you will both act and talk together as becometh Christians, as becometh the

dutiful and obedient servants of the blessed Jesus, careful to observe and do whatsoever he hath bidden you, that so ye may receive that blessed sentence from him,
Well done, good and faithful servants : enter ye into your Master's joy.



S E R M O N CXXVII.

A SPITTAL SERMON.

1 TIM. vi. 17, 18.

Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy. That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

THE great article of Christ's resurrection from the dead is so necessary to be thoroughly considered, and firmly believed, by all that expect salvation from him, that the church doth not think it sufficient to set apart that day only on which it happened, but hath added the two next also, for the annual commemoration of it. And accordingly we have now spent three days together in the exercise of our faith and meditations upon this great truth, that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, having in our nature suffered death upon the cross for our redemption, was, upon the third day after, raised again to life, and ever lives to make intercession for us: whereby we are fully assured, that *he is able to save to the utmost all that come unto God by him*: and that we in particular are all capable of obtaining eternal salvation, by his merits and mediation for us.

But, that we may actually obtain what he hath thus purchased for us, it is necessary to observe whatsoever he hath been pleased to require of us; which would be

a very proper meditation for this day. But I shall consider it no further at present, than as it respects the occasion and end of our assembling here at this time. Which is to consider of the most effectual means to excite and stir up those, who are able, to a liberal contribution to the relief of the sick and needy ; for that this is one of those great duties which Christ our Saviour requires of us, is plain from the words which I have now read, as being dictated by the Spirit of Christ himself to his apostle St. Paul, who having ordained Timothy a bishop, and settled him in the see of Ephesus, the chief city of all the proconsular Asia, he, in this divine Epistle, sends him instructions how to govern the church, and how to preach and propagate the Gospel which he himself had planted there ; and, in the foot of the Epistle, he, in the name of Christ, lays this command upon him, *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, &c.*

Which words, though at first directed only to Timothy, were, in him, intended for all succeeding ministers and preachers of the Gospel : such, I mean, who are solemnly ordained and set apart for that work. We are all obliged, in our preaching, to observe this command ; without which we can never do any good upon those that hear us. For so long as men's minds are set upon riches, and the things of this world, we may preach our hearts out, before we can ever persuade them, in good earnest, to mind that happiness which the Son of God hath procured for them in the world to come. This St. Paul knew well enough : and therefore hath left this upon record, not only as his advice and counsel, but as a strict command and duty, incumbent upon all who are sent to preach the Gospel, that they charge them who are rich not to be *high-minded, &c.*

Where we may first observe, how we are here enjoined and empowered to *charge them that are rich, &c.* A word much to be observed ; he doth not say, desire, beseech, counsel, or admonish, but *παράγγελε τοῖς*

πλουσις, charge, command the rich: the word properly signifies such a charge as judges at an assize or sessions make in the king's name, enjoining his subjects to observe the established laws and statutes of the kingdom. And thus it is that we are here required to charge you, in the name of our great Lord and Master, the King of all kings, that you *be not high-minded*, &c.

Neither doth this power, committed to us, extend itself only to the meaner sort of people, who, by reason of their extreme poverty and want, may seem inferior to us, but even to the rich also, *charge them that are rich in this world*: and the reason is, because we come not to you in our own names, but in his that gives you all the riches you have, and can take them away again when he pleaseth, who makes the poor rich, and the rich poor, as he sees good; so that the rich and the poor are all alike to him, and equally subject to his authority and power. And therefore, we preaching only in his name, as his ministers, or heralds, authorized and commissioned by him to publish and proclaim his will and pleasure to you, we can make no distinction, but must acquaint all indifferently with what he would have them do. And as for the rich, they are so far from being excepted out of our commission, that we are here commanded to charge several duties upon them, particularly *charge them*, saith the apostle, *that are rich in this world*.

But who are they? is a question that deserves a serious resolution; for most men, how much soever they have, yet not thinking themselves to have enough, are apt to fancy that they are not the persons whom the apostle means. But whatsoever we may think of ourselves, I believe there are but few here present, except blue-coats, but who, in a Scripture-sense, are *rich in this world*: for whatsoever any of you have, over and above your necessary maintenance, in that state of life to which God hath called you, that is properly your riches; as appears plainly from Agar's wish, *give me*

neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me, Prov. xxx. 8. from whence it naturally follows, that as nothing but want of convenient food is poverty, so whatsoever any man hath above that, all circumstances considered, is his riches : and such a one is truly *rich in this world*, and may justly be reckoned among those upon whom we are here commanded to charge several duties : which, by his assistance who requires them of you, I shall endeavour briefly to explain to you.

First, therefore, *charge them*, saith the apostle, *that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded.* A necessary caution for rich men ; for riches are apt to puff men up with vain and groundless conceits of themselves ; so as to fancy themselves to be better, because richer than other men. Which great mistake we are here commanded to rectify, by charging them not to entertain such high and proud conceits of themselves upon that account, but to be still as humble and lowly in their own eyes, as if they had no more than what is just necessary for them.

And indeed whatsoever any of you have more, do but impartially weigh it in the balance either of right reason, or your own experience, and you will soon find it so light and inconsiderable, that although you may be in many respects worse, you are no way really the better for it ; and therefore can have no just cause to value yourselves at all upon it. You may fancy yourselves, I confess, to be rich, and others may esteem you to be so, but what real advantage is that to you ? Are you ever the wiser, or juster, or holier for it ? Do you love God, or God love you, the more because you are rich ? Are you ever the freer from cares and fears in your minds, from pains and aches in your bodies, or from crosses, troubles, and disappointments in the world ? Do you enjoy more health, sleep sounder, or live longer than other men ? Are ye ever the more satisfied because ye have much, or happier because richer ?

You cannot but all know the contrary ; even that the riches of this world are so far from quenching, that they do but increase your thirst after them ; and instead of easing you of any trouble, bring more upon you. And therefore you have no cause, surely, to be proud and high-minded, but all the reason in the world to be humble and lowly under such a burden as they lay upon you. Especially considering, that as they cannot make you happy here, they will very much hinder you from being so hereafter : I speak not this of myself ; no, you have the word of Christ himself for it, saying, *Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God,* Matt. xix. 23, 24. from whence, the least that can be inferred is, that it is more difficult for the rich than for the poor to be saved, and, by consequence, that their riches rather hinder than promote their salvation. Which certainly our Saviour himself would never have asserted, but that he knew it infallibly to be true ; neither would he have left it upon record, but that it is necessary that all people should know and believe it. Which whosoever doth, will find but little cause to be proud of his riches, or high-minded, much less to

Trust in uncertain riches. Which is the next thing we are here commanded to mind you of. An hard lesson, I confess, for a rich man to learn ; nothing being more difficult than to have riches, and not to trust on them ; as our Saviour himself also intimates, in that he explains the one by the other, as things very rarely served, Mark ix. 23, 24. But to trust on riches is altogether as absurd and ridiculous as to be proud of them ; for what can you trust in them for ? they can neither make you good, nor do you good ; they of themselves can neither feed you, nor clothe you, nor refresh you, nor stand you in any stead, without God's blessing ; and that you can never expect, so long as you trust on them ; that being one of the greatest sins that

a man can be guilty of, nothing less than idolatry itself. And therefore, as the Wise-man saith, *he that trusteth in his riches, shall fall*, Prov. xi. 28. that is, he shall fall into all the misery that God hath threatened against the worst of sinners; so far from having God's blessing upon what he hath, that every thing he hath shall be cursed to him. And besides, it is in vain to trust on uncertain riches, upon that very account because they are uncertain, or rather uncertainty itself: for so the Greek words import, nor trust ἐπὶ πλούτου ἀδηλόγητι, *in the uncertainty of riches*,

But in the living God, who is a certain help and succour, stay and refuge, protection, defence, and all things to those who put their trust in him; and who, as the apostle here saith, *gives us all things richly to enjoy*. So that it is not your wit or policy, it is not your care or industry, it is not your trading and traffic in the world; it is only God that gives you all you have. And as it is he alone that makes you rich, so he can make you poor again when he pleaseth: and you have just cause to fear he will do so, unless you faithfully observe what is here charged upon you.

Which therefore that you may do, so as to have your riches both continued and blessed to you, as I have briefly shewn how you ought not to abuse them, so as either to be high-minded, or trust on them, so I shall as briefly explain the use he would have you put them to, that so you may both answer his ends in bestowing them upon you, and improve them to your own benefit and advantage.

Here are four duties therefore, which the most high God doth positively charge upon all rich men.

1. *That they do good*, i. e. with their riches; that you neither hoard them up, out of a covetous humour, nor prodigally throw them away, either to any ill purpose, or to none at all; but that you put them to some good use, or, as the apostle here words it, *that you do good* with them: an expression much to be observed; for it seems from hence, that although riches be not

really good for you in themselves, yet you may do good with them if ye will, and so make them really good and profitable to you. But for that purpose, it is necessary that you employ them only to good uses, and to such uses only, because they are good ; so as to have no other end or design in it, but only to do good with what you have ; and there are two sorts of uses which riches may be put to, so as that you may be truly said to do good with them, and they are pious and charitable uses.

Where, by pious uses, I mean such as have an immediate respect to God himself, whereby your riches are employed towards the better performing of his service and worship, to the erecting, fitting, or adorning of places for it, to the more frequent celebration of it in such places, and to the maintenance and encouragement of those who are set apart for it, to the propagating of his Gospel, to the conversion of Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics, and of all sorts of profane, atheistical, and wicked persons to him, that his great name may be better known, and more honoured and revered in the world. It was for this end that he made you, and it was for this end that he hath made you rich, that he himself might receive more honour and glory from you ; and therefore doth expressly require it of you, saying, *Honour the Lord with all thy substance, with all thy riches, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase*, Prov iii. 9. so that to honour God, by giving to such pious uses, is a great duty, not only necessary to be performed by all that are able, but necessary to be performed also in the first place, or before all other duties.

And the reason is, because God is the universal Proprietor, the head Landlord of all the world, and you have nothing but what you receive from him, and hold immediately under him, who may fine you at pleasure, or throw you out of possession whensoever he sees good. Now lest you should forget this, even upon what tenure it is that you hold your estates, he hath enjoined you to pay him, as it were, a quit-rent, or tribute, out of what

you possess, as an acknowledgment that it is only by his favour and blessing that you possess it. So that whatsoever it is that you do, or can offer to him, it is but a just debt that you owe him ; which if you neglect to pay, you lose your tenure, and forfeit what you have to the great Lord of the manor, the supreme Possessor of heaven and earth. Hence it is, that in all former ages they who were truly pious, and had a due sense of God upon their minds, were always ready and careful to pay this their homage and duty to him, out of what they held under him ; insomuch, that many of them never thought they could give enough to any pious use, whereby to testify their acknowledgment of God's dominion over them, his bounty and kindness to them ; as likewise their right and property in what they had.

A notable instance of this we have in the children of Israel ; for when the tabernacle was to be built for the service of God, they were so far from being backward in contributing towards it, that they presently brought more than could be employed about it, *Exod. xxxvi. 5.* so it was too in the building of the temple, which David, and all the rich men of Israel, made great preparations for : and that they did it, that they might thereby acknowledge God to be the Lord and Giver of all they had, and of their power to give it too, is plain from that divine hymn which David composed and sung upon that occasion, saying, *Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, our Father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty : for all that is in heaven and in the earth is thine ; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thy hand is the power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort ? for all things come of thee, and of thine*

own have we given thee, 1 Chron. xxix. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. This was doing good indeed, and honouring God with their substance, according as he commanded. And whosoever consults the records of the church, may easily find, that Christians, in all ages, have been as eminent as ever the Jews were for such pious and good works; seeing most of the churches in Christendom, and especially in this nation, were built by particular persons. And therefore, as ever any of you desire, to be what you profess, Christians indeed, such as the primitive Christians were, and such as our holy religion obligeth us all to be, *men fearing God, and hating covetousness*, you must take all opportunities, as you have a great many, of expressing your thankfulness to God for what you have, by devoting as much as you can of it to his service and honour, to pious, or else, in the next place,

To charitable uses, that is, to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, redeeming the captive, instructing the ignorant, supplying the indigent, correcting the wicked, supporting the orphans and widows, healing the sick in mind or body, and the like. Which kind of works, although they immediately respect the poor, yet what is done for them, God looks upon as done to himself; as our Lord hath taught us, saying, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*, Matt. xxv. 43. And as they who withhold their tythes, which are due for the service of God, so they also who withhold their offerings, which are due for the maintenance of the poor, are said to *rob God*, Mal. iii. 8. I say, which are due for the maintenance of the poor; for as God so orders it in his providence, that we have always some poor among us, that we may always know where to pay our rent and acknowledgment to him; so he hath imposed it as a duty upon the rich to maintain them. By which means he makes plentiful provision of all things necessary for the poor, as well as for the rich; giving more to the rich than they have real need of, on purpose that they might im-

part to the poor, who have real need of it. So that the poor have as much right to your alms, as you have to the rest of your estates, and you both rob God and them, unless you give it to them.

Whereas, on the other side, whatsoever it is that we, in obedience to him, bestow upon the poor, God, of his infinite mercy, is pleased to accept of it, as part of the tribute which we owe to himself, whereby to acknowledge the receipt of what we have from him, and express our thankfulness unto him for it. Which if we neglect to do, we have no ground to expect a blessing upon what we have, nor that it should be really good for us; for, as the apostle saith, *Every creature of God is good, if it be received with thanksgiving*, not else, 1 Tim. iv. 4. But no thanksgiving is acceptable to God, but what is expressed by deeds as well as words: and therefore it is necessary for you to pay this duty and service to God out of what you have, in order to the cleansing and sanctifying the residue of your estates to you; without which you have not the lawful and right use of what you possess, but every thing you have is polluted and unclean to you, as our Saviour himself intimates, saying, *But rather give alms of such things as ye have, and, behold, all things are clean to you*, Luke xi. 41. which divine sentence I heartily wish that you would always carry in your minds, and act accordingly: for I verily believe, that the great reason why so many estates are blasted so soon, and brought to nothing among us, as we see they are, is because men do not render unto God the duty and tribute which he hath charged upon their estates for himself and the poor, and then it is no wonder if God, in his providence, turn them out of possession, and give their estates to other persons, who shall be better tenants to him, and more careful to pay the duties which he requireth of them; according to that remarkable saying of the Wise-man, *He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor*, Prov. xxviii. 8. And

therefore, in order to the securing your estates to yourselves and your families, it is absolutely necessary to discharge the duties ye owe out of them to God and the poor; and so punctually to observe what we are here commanded to charge upon rich men, even *to do good*, and not only so, but,

2. *To be rich in good works*; that is, not only to do good, but to do all the good you can with what you have, so as to proportion your good works to the riches which God hath given you wherewith to do them; according to that apostolical rule, *let every one lay by him for good uses, as God hath prospered him*, 1 Cor. xvi. 2. And so in the place before quoted, Luke xi. 41. what we translate, *give alms of such things as ye have*, in the original it is, τὰ ἐνόντα ὅτε ἐλεημοσύνην, *give alms as much as ye are able*, for so the words properly signify. And, verily, whatsoever ye do of this kind, unless it be as much as you can, God will look upon it as nothing at all; for you must not think to compound with him. When God hath given you all ye have, he expects that you render him all that he requires of you, that is, as much as ye are able to give. And how little soever that be, yet it bearing a due proportion with your estates, it will be acceptable to him; as our great Master himself hath taught us, when, observing the rich men cast a great deal into the treasury, and a poor woman that cast in but two mites, he said, that she had *cast in more than they*, upon this account, because *they had cast in of their abundance, but she of her want had cast in all she had*, or as much as she could, Mark xii. 44. from whence we may infer, that the poor may be as *rich in good works* as the richest; forasmuch as God doth not measure the goodness of our works by their bulk or quantity, but by the proportion which they bear with our ability to do them. So that he that gives a penny, may do as good a work as he that gives a pound, and a better too, because his may be as much as he is able, and the others less; and so he that gives a little may

do as much good, when he that gives much doth none at all. I wish you would all weigh and consider this, lest otherwise ye go out of the world without ever having done one good work in it: for he that is not thus *rich in good works*, may be confident he doth no good at all with his riches.

But it is further to be observed here, that this expression, *rich in good works*, plainly implies, that *good works* are indeed our principal riches; and that you must not compute your riches from what you have, but from what you give to pious and good uses; for what you have is not yours, but God's in your hands; but what you give is yours in God's hand, who acknowledgeth that you lend it to him, and promiseth to pay it you again, Prov. xix. 17. And therefore the next time you cast up your accounts to know how rich you are, do not reckon upon what money you have lying by you, nor upon what houses or lands you have, nor upon what men owe you; but reckon upon what you have transmitted into the bank of heaven, upon what treasure you have laid up there, upon how much you have distributed to pious and charitable uses: for, whatsoever you may think at present, I dare assure you, that will be found to be your only riches another day. Wherefore, as ever any of you desire to be rich indeed, you must take this course, do all the good you can with what you have, and then you will be rich in the esteem of God himself; *rich*, as the apostle here speaks, *in good works*. But for that purpose you must observe, likewise, what follows, even to be,

3. *Ready to distribute*; that is, ready upon all occasions to pay your tribute to God, whensoever he, in his providence, calls for it, catching at all opportunities to do good, and glad when you can find any, and making some where you can find none; *as we have opportunity*, saith the apostle, *let us do good unto all men*, Gal. vi. 10. implying that when we can get an opportunity to do good, whatsoever other business is neg-

lected, we must lay hold on that offer. God, be sure, is to be served in the first place: and therefore you must not adjourn and put off so great and necessary a duty to him from day to day, much less to the last, as the custom of some is, who never give any thing to God, or the poor, so long as they can keep it themselves; but in their last will and testament leave them, perhaps, a legacy, and then think they do a good work: but whatsoever good may be done by what is so given, it is no good work in him that gives it; for he doth not give it from himself, but from his heirs or executors; and therefore no thanks can be due to him for it. Wherefore, as ever you desire to do any good with what you have, you must be always *ready to distribute*; and not only so neither, but also

Willing to communicate; which is the last duty here charged upon rich men, or rather, the last qualification required to the doing good with their riches. You must communicate them, not only with your hands, but with your hearts too; *not grudgingly, or of necessity*, as if ye are angry that God hath laid such a tax upon your estates; *for*, as the apostle saith, *God loves a cheerful giver*, 2 Cor. ix. 7 and will accept of none but free-will offerings from you: insomuch that if ye be not as willing to do good works, as ye are to have wherewith to do them, whatsoever works ye do, will have nothing of goodness in them: and therefore, in plain terms, as any of you desire to be *rich in good works*, as cometh Christians, and as it is your interest as well as duty to be, you must not stay till you are compelled, or persuaded, or entreated by others to do them; but you must set upon them of your own accord, out of pure obedience to God, and from a due sense of your constant dependence upon him, and obligations to him, so as to take pleasure in pleasing him, and in paying your service and thanks to him, for the manifold blessings he hath heaped upon you.

And, verily, one would think you should not need

many arguments to persuade you to be willing to do that which is so much for your own good ; that, without it, nothing that you have is really good to you : whereas by doing good with what you have to others, every thing you have will be good to yourselves, not only in this life, but also in that which is to come : for, by this means, as the apostle here adds, *you will lay up for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that you may lay hold on eternal life.* A strange expression ! so strange, that if the apostle himself had not said it, some would have questioned the truth of it. Yet it is no more than what our Lord himself assures us, where he saith, *lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through and steal,* Matt. vi. For the understanding whereof, we may consider, that although there be no such intrinsic worth or value in good works, whereby they that do them can merit any thing from God, for their doing of them ; yet being done in obedience to his will, and for the glory of his name, he accepts so graciously of them, that, for Christ Jesus's sake, he will most certainly reward us for them, infinitely above what we can either desire or deserve : as we plainly see in Cornelius, who being a *dévout man, one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always,* God was so well pleased with him for it, that he dispatched an angel from heaven, on purpose to acquaint him, that his *prayers and his alms were gone up for a memorial before God,* and to direct him to the way how he might attain eternal life, Acts x. 4, 5. And this is that which our Lord means, when he saith, *make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations,* Luke xvi. 9. that is, distribute and employ the unrighteous and deceitful riches of this world in such a way as is most pleasing and acceptable to God, that when they fail you, he may be your friend,

and receive you into everlasting habitations. And, to put the matter quite out of dispute, he that will then be Judge hath told us beforehand, that, at the last day, he will either advance us to heaven, or condemn us to hell, according as we have or have not done good while we were upon earth, Matt. xxv. from all which we may certainly conclude, that to do good with what we have, is the only way to be ever the better for it ; according to that remarkable saying of the rabbins, מלח ממונ צדקה *good works are the salt of riches*, that which keeps them from corruption, and makes them savoury and acceptable to God, and, by consequence, useful and profitable to the owners.

The sum of all is this, unless you, who are entrusted with the riches of this world, do faithfully discharge the trust that is reposed in you, by doing all the good you can with them, you deprive yourselves of the true enjoyment of them, and of all the advantage that you may receive from them ; and, besides that, you forfeit your right and title to them, by the non-payment of the rent-charge which God hath reserved to himself upon them ; and therefore may justly expect every moment to be turned out of possession : and although God forbear you for a while, all the while, perhaps, that you are in this world, yet in the next they will be so far from being a comfort, that they will be a torture and vexation to you ; insomuch that you will then wish, with all your souls, that you had either never had them, or else had made better use of them : witness the rich man in the Gospel, who was no sooner dead, but the next news we hear of him was, that he was in hell, and had not so much as a drop of water to cool his inflamed tongue. Whereas, on the other side, if you do good with your riches, if you devote them to the service of God, and to the relief of the poor, you will not only secure both the possession and enjoyment of them to yourselves and your families here, but you will receive benefit from them hereafter too. So that your estates will not die

with you, but you will have joy and comfort of them in the other world, and have cause to bless God for them to all eternity.

By this time, I hope, you are all so fully satisfied, both of the necessity of good works, and of the profit that will accrue unto you by them, that you are resolved, by the blessing of God, to take the next opportunity you can get of enriching yourselves this way. Wherefore nothing now remains but to acquaint you, that you can never want an opportunity of doing either pious or charitable works, if ye will but set yourselves in good earnest about it.

As for works of piety, here is the once famous cathedral of St. Paul, dedicated to the most solemn worship and service of the most high God, demolished, as ye know, together with the city, by a dreadful fire; and though your own houses have been long since rebuilt, yet this, the house of God, the mother-church, not only of this city, but of the whole diocese, is not to this day, nor even can be finished, without a more liberal contribution than hath been hitherto made for it; which is a great shame and reproach to the city, and the whole kingdom. Besides that, there are many churches wanting in the suburbs of the city, or near to it; and in several parts of the kingdom, the service of Almighty God is either totally omitted, or very meanly performed, for want of a sufficient maintenance for the performance of it. And whatsoever you give towards such uses, you may be confident that God will accept of it as done to himself, it having so immediate relation to his own honour, and to the exercise of the holy religion, that he, of his infinite goodness, hath established among us.

But as you ought not to be altogether for charitable uses, so as to neglect the pious, so neither ought ye to lay out all upon pious uses, so as to neglect the charitable; for which you can never want an opportunity, having the poor always with you, as our Lord said. But the occasion of our present meeting bespeaks your cha-

city in an especial manner for the poor; the sick, the maimed, and the distracted, that, being destitute of all other helps, are daily brought into the hospitals in and about this city, where they are maintained, and have both food and physic provided for them, merely upon charity. Where what care is taken of them, and how God blessed the charity that is given to them, appears plainly from this list, or catalogue, of those who have been admitted into, and dismissed from, these places the last year

Having read this, I need not say much to it, the thing speaks enough for itself; for you cannot but all believe, that they who are under the care and conduct of these hospitals, many whereof are now before you, are as great objects of charity as you can ever meet with in the world: and you cannot but be satisfied also, that whatsoever you shall give to them, will be as faithfully disposed of, to the ends and purposes for which you give it, as if you saw it done with your own eyes; many of yourselves, and other the most eminent and worthy citizens, being the governors and overseers of it; so that nothing is left for you to do, but to give in a right manner, that is, out of pure obedience to God's command, and in due proportion to the estates which he, for such purposes, hath entrusted with you: as many of your pious ancestors have done before you; who, by their liberal contribution to the erecting and support of these hospitals, are still doing good with the estates they got upon earth, though they themselves be gone to heaven. Many of them are long since dead, and yet their good works live to this day, and will do so, I hope, to the end of the world: and why should not yours do so too? Blessed be God, you have all, more or less, wherewithal to give, as they had: and if you be but as *ready to distribute*, and as *willing to communicate*, as they were, you also will have the benefit and comfort of your estates always continued to you, as they have.

This therefore is that which I would now advise you

to. It is true, we are here empowered not only to advise, but to *charge them who are rich in this world* to do good with their riches : but I hope I need not exercise that power here. I do not question, but that some of you are *rich in good works* already, and am willing to persuade myself, that others, for the future, will strive to be so ; and, for that purpose, are resolved to contribute liberally to these pious and charitable uses above mentioned. And therefore, all that I have now to desire of such, is only that you would do it presently, and also proportionably to what you have wherewith to do it ; as remembering, that unless you proportion your charity to your estates, God may justly proportion your estates to your charity ; and, if you will not give as much as you are able, make you able to give no more than you do.

But fearing there may be some among you who, notwithstanding all that hath been said, either out of diffidence of God's word, or carelessness of their own eternal good, are not yet resolved to do their duty in this particular, I must do mine, in acquainting you plainly, in the name of him who sent me, that it is not left to your own choice, whether you will do it or no ; but he, the eternal God, who made you, and ere long will judge you, doth expressly require, command, and charge all you who are *rich in this world*, that you be not *high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in him the living God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy. That ye do good, that ye be rich in good works, that ye be ready to distribute, and willing to communicate ; laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that ye may lay hold on eternal life : through Jesus Christ our Lord ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory.* Amen.

S E R M O N CXXVIII.

OBEDIENCE TO GOVERNORS.

I PET. ii. 13.

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.

WHEN Josiah king of Judah was slain in his wars with Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, the church and people of God were so mightily troubled for the loss of so pious and excellent a prince, that they did not only lament his death at present, but they devoted the day, on which it happened, to fasting and humiliation, for many years after; as may be easily gathered from 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. how much more cause have we to spend this day, as we are commanded, every year, in fasting and mourning, for the death of our late most gracious sovereign, King Charles the First, who was not killed, as Josiah was, by a foreign power, but murdered by his own subjects; not by chance of war, but by a formal pretended court of justice, the whole nation standing by, without endeavouring to rescue and deliver him; whereby it became, in a great measure, accessory to his death and murder, and, by consequence, guilty of that royal and sacred blood which was then shed. And notwithstanding the greatness of the sin, aggravated with the most dismal circumstances that any sin could then be capable of, it was a long time before the nation in gene-

ral was sensible of it, or made any public shew of repentance and remorse for it: until at length, being come to itself, and having its eyes opened, it plainly saw it was absolutely necessary to find out some expedient, whereby to prevent, if possible, these public calamities, which so public and horrid a sin would otherwise bring upon us.

Whereupon, being assembled in Parliament, both Lords and Commons humbly besought his Majesty, that this 30th day of January, whereon that execrable murder was committed, might be set apart and kept in all churches as an anniversary day of fasting and humiliation, to implore the mercy of God, that neither the guilt of the sacred and innocent blood, nor those other sins whereby God was provoked to deliver up both them and their king into the hands of cruel and unreasonable men, might at any time after be visited upon them or their posterity; which being accordingly assented to, and signed by our gracious Sovereign, and so passed into an Act, we, in obedience thereunto, are now here assembled for the purposes aforesaid.

But that we may not meet in vain, but may effectually obtain the mercy we fast and pray for, even the pardon of the sin which was this day committed, there are two things necessary to be done.

First, that we be truly humbled under the sense of it, And then,

Secondly, that we be stedfastly resolved against all such sins for the future.

As for the first, I suppose I need not say much, being willing to persuade myself, that you do not come hither to mock God, but that you really believe, that the sin ye have now confessed to him was so great and heinous, that he might justly inflict the severest of his judgments upon you, and the whole nation for it. For he that hath any sense at all, either of good or evil, cannot but be sensible, that there was as much sin or evil in the murder of the late king, as any one act could be

capable of. The murder of a private person, though never so wicked, was always judged, by the very law of nature, to be one of the most wicked acts that mankind could be guilty of. But what then shall we think of the murder of a king, a wise, a sober, a just, a merciful, a pious king? or rather, who can think of it at all, without horror and amazement? especially when we consider how many other sins concurred to the effecting of it, or else were joined with it; pride, envy, malice, covetousness, theft, sacrilege, hypocrisy, schism, sedition, lying, perjury, treason, rebellion, what not? and such a sin as this, which was not only so great in itself, but had such a train of the most diabolical vices attending upon it, either going before, or else following after it, what punishment could be too great for it? what could be great enough? certainly, if God should have punished this sin according as it deserved, the whole nation, before now, had been turned into an *aceldama*, a field of blood. It is true, he hath already laid more than ordinary punishments upon the nation in general, and upon this city in particular, which was so deeply concerned in this sin. But we must acknowledge, that he hath yet punished us less than this iniquity deserved, and have just cause to expect much greater judgments to be still behind, which will certainly fall upon us, unless prevented by a timely and sincere repentance.

And this is the reason why we are commanded to keep this day so strictly, that, if it be possible, we may avert that vengeance that hangs over our heads, and is ready, each moment, to fall upon us, for that sacred and innocent blood that was this day shed amongst us: for which end we have already been humbling ourselves before Almighty God, under the sense of it: and so have, in some measure, done the first thing, which I said was necessary thereunto. But this will avail us nothing without the other, as not being sincere and cordial; for no man can be said truly to be humbled for any sin, that still continues in the practice of it. And

it is not he that only confesseth, but *whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall have mercy*, Prov. xxviii.

13. Hence it is that the church hath not only prescribed us a form of sound words, wherewith to address ourselves to God, and implore his mercy in the pardon of this sin, but hath likewise appointed such a portion of Scripture for the Epistle this day, wherein we are expressly enjoined, both to avoid such sins as this was, and to perform the contrary duties for the future. Which therefore I thought good to, pitch upon for the main subject of my discourse, if by any means I may be so happy as to convince you of the necessity that lies upon you, as Christians, to make conscience of doing what is here commanded by the apostle, saying, *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*. Where we may first observe two things in general.

1 That this is as clear and positive a command as any in the whole Bible. So that we are as much obliged to *submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*, as we are to pray, to hear, or perform any other duty whatsoever. And so, on the other side, the transgression of this is as great a sin, as the breach of any other law. And he that doth not punctually observe what is here commanded, he lives in a known sin, or in the wilful neglect of a known duty; and, by consequence, whatsoever he may profess, he is no good man, much less a good Christian, who does not always make conscience of one duty as well as of another

2. We may observe in general, that this command is as general as the Epistle of which it is part, equally obliging all sorts of persons whatsoever to submit themselves to their governors; according to that parallel place, Rom. xiii. 1. *let every soul be subject to the higher powers*: where St. Chrysostom observes, that Πᾶσι ταῦτα διατάσσεται καὶ ἱερεῦσι καὶ μοναχοῖς, οὐχὶ τοῖς βιωτικοῖς μόνον; *these things are commanded to all men, even to priests, and monks also, not only to seculars*. So that clergy and laity, all sorts of persons, of whatsoever de-

gree, or quality, or estate, are bound to be subject to those whom God hath set over them. And therefore when the popes of Rome, who call themselves St. Peter's successors, take upon them to exempt the clergy from their subjection, and to absolve subjects from their allegiance to their prince, (as they have sometimes done in this, as well as other kingdoms,) they act directly contrary to the decree of St. Peter, whom they pretend to succeed, or rather, to the express command of Almighty God himself, who here expressly commands all subjects, under what prince soever they live, to submit themselves to him, and that at all times too; for the command is general, as to time as well as persons: so that whatsoever happens, still the command holds good, and ought to be religiously observed by all who would act as Christians: *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.*

Seeing therefore that here is a plain and necessary duty, indispensably required of all and every one of you, you cannot but all be highly concerned to understand the nature and extent of it, what it is that Almighty God would have you do, when he commands you to *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man.* For which purpose, therefore, I shall briefly explain the terms or words by which he hath revealed his will to us, and consider,

I What we are to understand here by *every ordinance of man*; or, every human creature, as the words might be translated: which taken singly, or by themselves, may seem something obscure; and therefore critics have exercised their wits variously upon them, and indeed to little or no purpose at all; for St. Peter doth sufficiently explain what he means by them, in the following words, saying, *whether it be to the king as supreme, or to governors, as unto them which are sent by him.* From whence it is manifest, that by *every ordinance of man*, he means all and every one that is entrusted with the government of the place or country

where we live. First, the king, as supreme magistrate, who receives his commission immediately from God himself, and therefore is accountable to none but him for the execution of it, as the apostle here plainly intimates, in that he calls him the *supreme*; for if he be supreme, then all other persons in his kingdoms are inferior to him, both singly and jointly: so that neither any one, nor all together, can justly pretend to any power over him, because they are all under him; otherwise he would not be the supreme, as the apostle here calls him.

Neither is this duty to be performed only to the king himself, but, as the apostle adds, to *governors* also, as to those who are *sent by him*, that is, who are commissioned by the king, as he is by God, to administer justice, and execute the laws of the land, so far as their commission reaches. So that by this divine law we are obliged to submit ourselves to those whom the king sets over us, as well as to the king himself, whom God sets over us; for the commission which the king grants to them, is but part of that which he received from God; and therefore ought to be submitted to as much as if the king himself had still kept it in his own hands; for it is still his power in their hands, who are only entrusted by him with the administration or execution of it.

Hence therefore all that desire to perform this duty aright, must submit themselves not only to the king in person, but likewise to all those who act by commission under him; or, as the apostle here words it, to the *governors*, as mayors, judges, aldermen, justices of the peace, or the like, who are sent by him.

But here we may further observe, that this command was laid upon all Christians, when there was never a Christian king or governor in the world, but were all rather inveterate enemies to Christianity itself, and endeavoured all they could to destroy and banish it out of the world; yet, for all that, all Christians are here commanded to submit to them. Which shews, that this

duty is to be performed to the king, as such : not because he is a Christian, a just, a merciful king, but because he is a king authorized by God to rule and govern us.

And therefore the apostle here doth not command us to submit ourselves to the king, as good, or kind, or just, but as supreme ; nor to governors, as eminent for grace and virtue, but as sent by the king. So that he that would perform this duty as he ought, must not only submit himself to the king, but he must do it only as he is king, as one authorized and deputed by God to rule and govern the country. Neither must he submit to the governors which are sent by him, upon any other account, but merely because they are sent by him: for he that submits himself upon any other consideration, whatsoever other law he may observe in it, be sure he doth not obey this.

2. What it is properly *to submit ourselves to every ordinance of man ?*

To understand this aright, we may observe, first, that St. Paul, speaking of this submission, or subjection, which is due to the higher powers, he opposeth it to resisting of them, Rom. xiii. 1, 2. Wherefore he that resists the king, breaks this law, which requires submission to him. But who may be properly said to resist the king ? all that conspire his death, oppose his authority, or take up arms against him ; all that countenance, assist, or encourage those that do so ; all that supply them with men, arms, counsel, or money ; all that sow sedition, raise tumults, or promote riots and mutinying against the government ; all that ever had, or still have, an hand in dividing the king's subjects, and so in seducing them from their allegiance to him : in short, all that do any thing in opposition to the king, or strengthen the hands of those that do so, by defending of them, or adhering to them, they may properly be said to resist the king, and, by consequence, break this law, which requires submission to him. And so do they

too, who, although they did not act, yet talk against him ; such as St. Jude calls *filthy dreamers, who defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities*, Jude 8. and so St. Peter, 2 Pet. ii. 10. such as defame and censure the king or his officers of state, of injustice, neglect, or mal-administration ; such as write or disperse libels against him ; such as raise or carry about stories and ill reports of him or his government, to lessen him in the esteem of the people, and so take off their love and affection from him ; for such things plainly tend to the disturbance of his government, and to the making his people uneasy under it, and ready to catch at all opportunities of rising up against it, and therefore is a manifest resisting of him, and, by consequence, a breach of this command. Yea, this, as well as all other divine laws, doth questionless reach the heart, as well as the hands and tongues of men : so that we are obliged by it to harbour no treasonable or rebellious thoughts against the king, nor to entertain any ill or low opinion of him, much less to desire or wish any evil to him, Eccles. x. 20. Above all, we are obliged by this law not to entertain such seditious principles, and unchristian doctrines, which are destructive of government, and so dissolve the very bonds of human society ; as, that the king receives his power from the people, and is accountable to them for the exercise of it : that if he neglects his duty to them, they are not bound to perform theirs to him : for such doctrines are not only contrary to the word of God, and to the known laws of the land, but they directly tend to resisting the king, and disturbing the government, as this nation found by woful experience, when such principles as these led men on, by degrees, not only to rebelling against the king, but to the murdering of him too at his own gates. Wherefore, as ever you desire not to live in the breach of this known law, you must be sure to avoid such diabolical opinions as these are, and whatsoever else tends to the resisting or opposing the king in deed,

in word, or thought ; for whatsoever doth so, is plainly repugnant to this divine command, whereby we are expressly commanded to *submit ourselves to every ordinance of man*.

But this non-resistance, although it be much, it is not all that is here required of us : it is true, all that do any way resist the higher powers, plainly transgress this law ; but every one that doth not resist, cannot be therefore said to observe it ; for it is a positive command, *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man* : which submission necessarily supposeth not only our non-resistance, but likewise our assistance of them, to the utmost of our power ; as when any tumults or insurrections are raised against the king, every one is hereby obliged to assist the government in the suppressing of them, as much as he can, in the place and station he is in : for otherwise, although he doth not join with the rebels or rioters, he doth not join with the king against them, and so doth not perform this duty to him ; for every one is bound to defend the government under which he lives, that so he may live peaceably and quietly under it ; and therefore when it is opposed by restless and ill men, there can be no such thing as a neuter in the kingdom ; for he that is not for the government is against it, and contributes to the destruction of it, by not performing his duty, and so not using the means which God hath appointed for his support and preservation. Hence therefore all that would carry themselves as becometh Christians in this case, must be as zealous for the government as others are against it, and make as much conscience of vindicating and defending it, as they do of resisting or setting themselves against it.

Neither is this all yet ; for when we are commanded to *submit ourselves to every ordinance of man*, we are thereby obliged also to submit to and observe those laws and ordinances which are established amongst us, by the government under which we live ; for he that

doth not obey the king's laws, can never be said to submit to him, or to his authority, but rather to resist it. It is true, if any earthly prince command that which is contrary to the laws of God, the universal Monarch of the world, in that case we must rather obey God than man. But, blessed be God, that can never be our case, as things now stand ; for nothing, ye know, is passed into a law amongst us, but what hath been first agreed upon and consented to not only by the temporal lords and commons, but by the bishops too, who ought, in reason and justice, to be supposed to understand the laws of God better than any private man can do. So that whatsoever laws are now in force amongst us, we may and ought to rest fully satisfied in our minds, that they are not repugnant to the word of God ; for if they had, they would have been abrogated before now.

Nay further, if there should happen a doubtful case, so that a man should have some reason to question, whether such a law be agreeable to the word of God or no, in such a case it is the safest way to do what the law requires ; for though he may doubt whether such a thing be agreeable to the word of God or no, yet they that made the law did not doubt of it : for if they had, they would not have made it. And it must needs be the safest way to submit ourselves, in such a case, to those whom we cannot but acknowledge to be wiser than ourselves, even to the king and two houses of parliament, who doubtless would be as unwilling to command any thing contrary to God's word, as we can be to obey it.

But, as I observed before, we have no such laws, that a man can in reason doubt of, whether they be agreeable to the word of God or no, and therefore none but what we are bound to obey ; insomuch that whosoever wilfully refuseth to obey the laws of the land, plainly transgresses the laws of God, which command us to *submit ourselves to every ordinance of man* ; for there can be no true submission without obedience.

I heartily wish, that all who live in the constant neglect and violation of the known laws of the church and state under which they live, would duly consider this before it be too late, for it concerns their future state; for Almighty God, before whom they must ere long appear, will then judge them according to his own laws, whereof this is one, that we *submit ourselves to every ordinance of man*, in all such things which he hath left indifferent, and so to be determined by those whom he hath empowered to do it, according as the circumstances of time and place require. And they who live and die in a wilful omission of, or opposition against, this divine law, live and die in a known sin; and what will be the consequence of that, I leave it to themselves to judge. Be sure all that would *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*, must take as much care of this as of any other duty whatsoever, even to *submit themselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*.

For the Lord's sake; which is the last thing to be explained. How for the Lord's sake? the phrase imports,

1. That it is not enough to submit ourselves in general, but we must do it in obedience to the Lord Jehovah, the *King of all kings*, and the *Governor of all things*. As in all the rest of God's commands, we must not only do what he hath commanded, but we must therefore do it because he hath commanded it; so here, we must not only submit ourselves to *every ordinance of man*, but we must do it *for the Lord's sake*, even because the Lord of hosts himself hath commanded us to do it. So that every act of obedience to the king ought to be done in obedience to God, it being indeed due to him, not only for his own sake, but, as the apostle here speaks, *for the Lord's sake*, who is his King and Governor, as he is ours. It is the authority of the most high God, that is the ground of our obligation to obey this, as well as any other command whatsoever; and

therefore they who do not obey this command, whatsoever they pretend, do not observe any of God's commands at all as they ought to do. For he that observes any of his commands, because they are his, cannot but observe this too, as being his command as well as any other.

From whence we may observe, that all that zeal for God that was pretended in the late rebellion against the king, was nothing else but hypocrisy and deceit: for if it had been true zeal for God, it would have kept them within the bounds of their duty to the king. If they had done any thing *for the Lord's sake*, as they pretended, they would have submitted to the king too *for the Lord's sake*, as they were expressly commanded by the Lord himself: but seeing, instead of that, they rebelled against him, they fought him, they imprisoned him, they murdered him, it is plain they were acted all along with a spirit of delusion, and hurried about by the prince of darkness, in the shape of an angel of light.

2. We must do it *for the Lord's sake*, that is, for the honour and glory of his great name, to which nothing contributes more than the meekness, patience, and peaceableness of those who profess the religion that our Lord Christ hath established in the world: because it shews the great power and force that his religion hath upon the minds of men, to keep their passions in order, and to make them loyal and submissive to their prince, as well as just and charitable to one another. Whereas if they who call themselves Christians should be heady and high-minded, traitors and rebels against their king, and disturb the peace of the country where they live, this would reflect mightily upon our Lord, as if he had established a religion in the world, which turned all things upside-down, wheresoever it came. For ignorant and foolish men, as the greatest part of mankind are, will be apt to impute all the miscarriages of those who profess the Christian religion, to the religion they profess. This is the reason that the apostle here gives, why

this command should be so religiously observed: *for so, saith he, is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, ver. 15. that is, God is pleased so strictly to command you to *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man*, that so, by this means, you may stop the mouths of those who would otherwise upbraid you for a company of turbulent and factious people, and charge your religion with being the cause of riots and tumults in the state, which would be a mighty dishonour to our Lord himself. And therefore you must needs be subject for his sake.

And verily, how great a blemish it is to any religion, for the professors of it to be seditious and troublesome to the state, the sad occasions of our present meeting is too clear an instance; for certainly that which struck off the king's head (I dread to speak it) was the greatest blow that was ever given either to the Protestant religion in particular, or the Christian in general, the enemies of our Lord taking occasion from thence to blaspheme his most holy name, especially such as either could not or would not distinguish betwixt those who only called themselves Protestants, or Christians, and such as were really so; for it is plain, that they, who engaged in the late rebellion, especially they that imbrued their hands in the blood of their sovereign, were so far from being Protestants, so far from being Christians, that they were of no religion at all, but a company of profligate atheistical wretches, who, under the pretence of the Christian, endeavoured to root out the sense of all religion from among us, committing such villanies, as the very Turks and heathens might blush to hear of, as being a shame to mankind in general. Yet, nevertheless, all these notorious outrages, by whomsoever committed, were still fathered upon our most holy religion, to the great dishonour of our Lord, who hath settled it amongst us: for whose sake therefore it behoves us not only to submit ourselves, but to do all

we can, that all among us may for the future do so, and so make up, if possible, the honour that our religion hath lost in the rebellion against the father, by our steady submission and allegiance to his son, out of sincere obedience to God's command, and for the glory of his great name; or, as it is here expressed, *for the Lord's sake*.

By this therefore you may see what St. Paul means, when he saith, *you must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake*, Rom. xiii. 5. that is, you must needs be submissive and obedient to the king, and higher powers, not only for fear of wrath and punishment, but out of a sense of your duty to God, and for the honour of his name; and to make as much conscience of this, as ye do of any other duty whatsoever, either to God or man, so as to be as fearful of resisting or rebelling against the king, or doing any thing that looks that way, as ye are, or ought to be, of theft, robbery, murder, or any other wickedness whatsoever. And the reason is, because that God hath plainly commanded you to be subject, and hath told you, that *whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation*, Rom. xiii. 2. For from hence it appears, that as theft, robbery, murder, or the like, so resistance of the king is a damnable sin: so that whosoever have been, or still are, guilty of it, without repentance, they will certainly be damned for it: he by whom they shall be judged hath told them so beforehand, and therefore they may believe him.

Thus now I have given you the true sense and meaning of this command, which the most high God hath laid upon you, and shewn how necessary it is, that you punctually and religiously observe it *for the Lord's sake*. From whence you may all see, how much it concerns those who have had any hand in this, or any other rebellion or conspiracy against the king, to repent of it before it be too late, for their eternal welfare depends upon it.

Wherefore if there be any such amongst you, as I fear there are, you must give me leave to deal plainly and faithfully with you, as becometh a minister of Christ to do.

You have now heard how positively the most high God hath commanded you to submit yourselves to those whom he hath set over you, for his sake. And you cannot but be conscious to yourselves how grievously you have offended against this divine law, by resisting, rebelling, and conspiring against the king, and so contributing towards his death and murder. Let me therefore ask you, in the name of God, where were your consciences ye so much talked of all this while, that they did not fly in your faces for so horrid a sin? how, were you not afraid to stretch forth your hands to destroy the Lord's anointed? or to raise or promote a rebellion against him? When David had but cut off the skirt of Saul's garment, it is said his heart smote him, his conscience checked him for it, and made him cry out, saying, *The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord*, 1 Sam. xxiv. 5, 6. And if David's conscience troubled him so much for cutting off a king's skirt, what shall we think of those who cut off their king's head? certainly, if their consciences were like David's, they would be so racked and tormented in their minds, that they would not be able to endure themselves. And if you, who were any way accessory to it, would but rouse up your consciences out of that dead sleep they have been in so long, you will find matter enough of grief and sorrow as long as you live.

But I hope I need not insist any longer upon this ungrateful, though necessary, subject; for my charity prompts me to believe, that by this time your eyes are all opened, so that you are truly sensible of, and sorry for, your sin, and desire so to repent of it, that God may pardon it. For which purpose I must advise you not

to think it enough to humble yourselves, as you do this day, at the remembrance of it, but make it your constant care and study, for the future, to avoid all appearance of rebellion, and to make as much conscience of being submissive, loyal, and obedient to the king, as ye do, or ought to do, of being just and charitable to other men, there being the same obligation upon you for the one, as for the other. Neither is this a duty incumbent only upon some of you, but upon all and every person in the congregation, you are all equally obliged to *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*. And therefore I beseech you, for the future, to be constant and conscientious in the doing of it: and for that end have a special care to avoid those ways and methods that the devil useth, whereby to draw men into treason and rebellion; especially take heed of schism and separation from the church, for that is the ready and common road to resistance and sedition against the state, as we have found by woful experience for above these forty years together. All the plots and treasons, the conspiracies and rebellions, that this kingdom hath been so much harassed and infested with all this while, have been hatched and carried on by those who have separated themselves from the communion of our church and religion established amongst us, either papists or sectaries. Whereas it is notorious to all the world, that they that have continued real members of our church, have been all along as faithful subjects to the crown. And it is no wonder, for indeed they cannot be otherwise if they would; for the spirit that runs through Christ's catholic church, and, by consequence, through ours, puts all the sound members of it upon universal obedience to all the commands of God; and so to this, among the rest, of honouring the king, and submitting themselves to the higher powers. Hence it is, that as we never heard of any rebels in the primitive church, so neither are there, nor can be, any such amongst those who are really of ours; which is

the great glory of our church, and an undeniable argument of its apostolical constitution : and that which, if it was duly considered, would make all the Christian princes in the world endeavour to reform the churches seated in their dominions, according to her pattern and example ; and to protect them too, when they are so reformed, if it was for nothing else but to keep their kingdoms quiet, and free from disturbance and tumults. This our late most gracious sovereign was so sensible of, that he chose rather to part with his crown and life too, than ever consent to the ruin and destruction of such a church, which contributed so much to the peace of his kingdoms, as well as to the salvation of his subjects ; and therefore died a real, a royal martyr in the defence of it.

It is his death and martyrdom we this day commemorate, and have been now considering how to prevent that vengeance which is due to the nation for it. For which purpose I have shewn, that it is necessary to repent, not only of the fact itself, but likewise of the sins which caused it, and to avoid and abhor them for the future, so as sincerely to perform the contrary duties of submission and obedience to the king and governors. There may be some, I fear, among you who, having given me the hearing, will concern themselves no more about what they have heard, but will be ready to catch at all opportunities they can of running into the same sins again. To them I shall say no more at present, but leave them to him, who hath told them beforehand what they must expect from him, in plain English, damnation.

But as for all such amongst you as do not care to be damned, but desire in good earnest to go to heaven, and for that end to perform sincere obedience to all the commands of God, now you have heard how strictly he hath commanded you to *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*, for his sake I beseech you to act accordingly.

Break off this and all your sins by *righteousness, and your iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor. Fear God, and honour the king, and meddle no more with them that are given to change. Study to be quiet, and to mind your own business,* and concern yourselves no further about your superiors, than to perform your duty to them, as God hath commanded. Suffer not the devil or his agents to seduce you into plots or conspiracies against the king, nor to conceal any that you know to be framed against him. But be as loyal to his person, as tender of his honour, as submissive to his authority, as obedient to his commands, as you desire Almighty God should be gracious and merciful to your immortal souls. Would you, and all the people of this kingdom, do thus, we should then have some ground to hope, that the most high God would pardon the horrid and crying sin that was this day committed; which we humbly beseech him to do for Christ Jesus' sake; *to whom, with the Father, &c.*

END OF VOL. V.

